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Crazy squirrel ... p.12

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Samson's mother – a woman of
quiet confidence ... p. 10

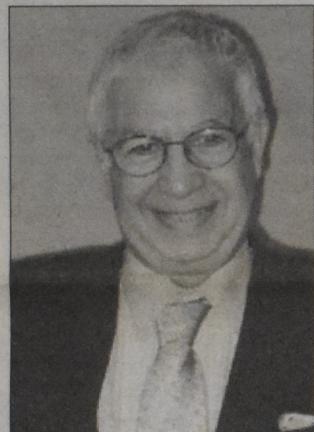
Will Iraq's new constitution protect freedom of religion? Charter recognizes Islam as the official religion of the state

Harry der Nederlanden

Relief that representatives of Iraq's Governing Council were able to agree on an interim constitution was mixed with apprehensions about incitements to civil war, as Shiite holy places became the target of anonymous attacks. The new constitution may not be all that Iraqi Christians had hoped for, but it was better than feared. The direction the constitutional debate was taking had filled many observers with foreboding, for it seemed that the US was gradually caving in to strong pressure to make Islamic law the basis of national law.

That would have been a huge setback for the rights of women and of religious minorities such as Iraq's small Christian community. A few months ago Iraq's new Minister of Higher Education, a fundamentalist Muslim (Wahhabi), fired all university presidents except those in the Kurdish areas and replaced them with Islamists. The latter quickly decreed that all women in the universities dress according to Islamic law. A couple of leading women were also removed from high government positions because religious authorities considered it demeaning for men to work under a woman. Paul Marshall, of Freedom House's Center for Religious Freedom, warned that if Paul Bremer, who is responsible for overseeing the process toward democratic government, kept making concessions to the Islamists, minorities will be repressed in the new Iraq.

Incidents of attacks against Iraqi Christians have also been increasing over the last year, in part because they are more open to cooperating with the Americans. Christian shop owners, the only ones who will sell alcohol, have



Amir Taheri

been killed, Christian schools in Mosul have been attacked, churches damaged, and on January 21 four Christian women on their way to work in an American forces laundry were murdered. Christian leaders in Iraq were afraid that liberated Iraq would be much more dangerous for them than was Iraq under Saddam, which was ruled (or misruled) by secular law.

The new constitution, however, does not recognize Islamic law as the sole basis for the state. Very good news for Iraqi Christians and those anxious about the place of women. Islam is enshrined as the state religion (as Christianity still is in some European countries), and no laws may be passed that are contrary to Islam. Moreover, the constitution sets a goal for women's participation in parliament: 25 percent of its representatives must be women. That's more progressive in terms of gender than the US or Canada.

How long such measures will stay in place after free elections are held remains to be seen, for

this is only an interim constitution.

Kurdish is recognized alongside of Arabic as one of the two official languages of the country, and the Kurds will enjoy a relative degree of autonomy, as the country is organized along federalist lines like Canada. A directly elected national assembly will choose a president and a prime minister, who will share power. The prime minister and his cabinet will have executive power, but the president will command the armed forces.

Thousands of Kurdish militiamen will be allowed to retain their weapons (a sticky issue), but they will be integrated into a national

guard under local supervision but ultimately answerable to the federal government. The Kurds have been virtually self-governing since 1991 and were not about to surrender that autonomy to a Shiite majority.

Feisal al-Istrabi, an Iraqi American lawyer who helped to draft the new constitution said, "This document protects the right of individuals more than any other document in the region."

It was hailed by US and Iraqi officials as without precedent in the Middle East, but an editorial in the *National Post* pointed out that this was not quite true. Several Arab states like Egypt have constitu-

tions that look good on paper, but they are not carried out in practice. The same editorial did acknowledge that the deal struck on the place of Islam – as one source of law alongside the civil rights of the charter – was a very significant advance.

Amir Taheri, a knowledgeable Iranian commentator, asked, Do Iraqis really want an Islamist regime? He cites five different public opinion polls held in Iraq since its liberation from Saddam's dictatorship that suggests such a regime garners support from less than 3 percent of the people. Even

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Aboriginal community celebrates 30 years of fellowship, hospitality, worship



PHOTO BY AIDEN S. ENNS
Henk DeBruyn, former director at Indian Family Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba joins Marion Sinclair, staff at Edmonton's Native Healing Centre at the 30th anniversary celebration.

Sonya Vanderveen-Feddeema

At the 30th anniversary celebration of the Indian Family Centre (IFC) on Feb. 20, 2004 in

Winnipeg, Manitoba, Arie Van Eek, one of the original visionaries, told those gathered for the celebration supper that the dream for the IFC

started as a nightmare. When he first surveyed the social conditions in the north end Winnipeg neighborhood where the IFC is now located – an area of the city with a large population of aboriginal people and known for issues of poverty, oppression, violence, racism, addiction, and brokenness – he was overcome with feelings of guilt and shame.

As Van Eek addressed the gathering of First Nations people and other IFC supporters, he said, "We are so glad that some of the First Peoples of this land have been patient with us long enough to trust us."

The need for a unique ministry to Native people in Canada was identified at the initial meeting of the Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada (CCRC) and was approved by the council in 1973. The ministry's mandate was

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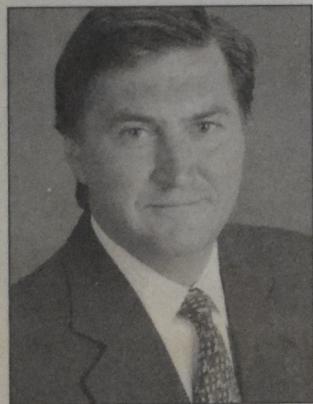
News

Iraq's new constitution

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the Shiites, who share the same brand of Islam with Iran, are not enamored with the model that has unfolded there under Khomeini. Taheri says most of them regard Khomeinism as an innovation and aberration in Islamic tradition.

Pastor Yousif Matty of the evangelical church in Kirkuk noted ominously, "Only 3 percent of those living in communist countries were communists. They never had popular support. The same is true with radical Islam. It doesn't have to be popular to take over our nation."



Paul Marshall

No church state separation

Why is it so difficult for Muslims to agree to a constitution that stipulates certain human rights as the basis of the country's laws? This is the question addressed in an article by Paul Marshall in the *National Review*. In the West, political leaders as well as journalists describe the relationship between religion and the state in terms of the separation of church and state (a contested principle here too), but Islam has no real equivalent of either our church or our clergy.

The Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the most prominent leader among the Shiite majority who recently shook things up by demanding early popular elections, is considered a quietist: he believes that religious authorities should have no direct role in government.

This does not mean, however, that Islamic "clergy" would have no impact on the way the country is run, for they are less clergymen than they are judges, says Marshall. Their training is in Islamic law, and it is their function to apply that law (shariah) to particular cases. In the past they have often been the only judges in Islamic countries.

Moreover, until recently most Islamic countries had no source of law other than that of the Quran and no legislative bodies. In the Islamic worldview human legislators do not create law. Only God can do that. And it is God's law as revealed in the Quran that creates the order of the state.

Although religious authorities do not implement and uphold the law, they do interpret it. The earlier draft of the constitution stipulated that the source of law would be Islam, left undefined. This would have left the definition of law not in the hands of a democratically accountable body but in the hands of religious authorities — supreme judges of shariah. The present compromise, therefore, is a huge step in the right direction.

Shariah and human rights

Taheri's view about the threat of shariah in Iraq is worth quoting at some length, since the issue has come up in many of CC's stories on Nigeria and Indonesia:

"Even the thorny issue of the shariah (religious law) need not cause frictions. No modern society can be policed with the shariah as its only legal framework. There is not a single Muslim country — including Iran, the Sudan and Saudi Arabia — where the shariah is the only law. Indeed, it cannot be because all Muslim states are signatories of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and hundreds of international treaties that are not of Islamic origin.

"There is no reason why the shariah should not be mentioned as one of the sources of law in Iraq. In practical terms this means that where the shariah is in conformity with reason, modern ethics, and international agreements, it will be applied. Where it is not, it will be set aside.

"The only effective way to settle these matters is through free and fair elections. Nowhere has an Islamist party advocating the shariah come to power through the ballot box."

Taheri's assessment is considerably more optimistic that those of Paul Marshall of Freedom House and Elizabeth Kendal of the World Evangelical Alliance's Religious Liberty Commission, but it does offer some grounds for hope that the liberation of Iraq will actually prove liberating.

It remains to be seen whether a clerical elite will exercise veto power over elected officials.

Aboriginal community

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to develop a working and worshiping community with the Indian and Metis peoples, encouraging them to use their unique gifts in Christ's service. Since that time, as the IFC has responded, changed, and developed according to the needs of the neighborhood in which it is located, it has continued to receive funding from the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Canada.

A sense of ownership

At the anniversary celebration, Henk DeBruyn, the first pastor and director of the IFC who served in that capacity for 26 years, reflected on the challenges of bridging the gap between aboriginal people and members of the CRC.

In an e-mail interview with *Christian Courier*, DeBruyn recalled those early days. On January 20, 1974 at his installation service, he had asked that Native people be present to welcome him in their midst. One of those people, the late Evert Monkman, supportively provided DeBruyn with a list of Native people living in the city, several of whom resided on DeBruyn's street. He visited them, introducing himself as a pastor in their community. Intent on gaining their cooperation and participation in his efforts, he invited their input, asking them what they thought would successfully initiate his ministry. Their answer? Bingo and Sunday school.

"Since Bingo was a big no-no for me," DeBruyn said, "that left me with Sunday school. But Sunday school was not high on my list of priorities. However, my commitment was to listen to the community's perception of my role and task, and so we started the Sunday school. A Presbyterian church on the same street allowed us to use their fellowship hall on Sunday afternoons."

In the first stages of the Sunday school program, DeBruyn invited parents and children to watch movies about Native culture. This provided an opening to discuss different aspects of their lives. The group then read the Bible and reflected on the passage. A Native elder concluded the session with prayer. Those who attended invited others, and soon the group of worshipers grew.

"The patterns set at the



Arie Van Eek was one of the early visionaries of the Indian Family Centre when it began in the early 1970s.

beginning of the ministry have been maintained throughout the years," DeBruyn explained. "This has made the ministry a place where Native people have a real sense of ownership and commitment to a healing ministry where their culture is respected."

According to DeBruyn, through the years the IFC has aspired to address both the personal and cultural need for redemption. He pointed out that healing in a cross-cultural ministry is always a two-way process. This meant that when he explored the cultural gifts of Native people and attempted to understand how they could be used in Christ's service, he was confronted with a personal question: "What is my culture as a Dutch Canadian, and how does it fit with the redemptive claims of Jesus?" He felt humbled as he struggled to find an answer.

DeBruyn discovered that when Christ enters people's hearts, he helps them distinguish how cultural gifts either create bondage or bring freedom.

"It was this process that enabled us to evolve into a community that can incorporate cultural practices in worship in liberating ways," he explained.

Providing hospitality

About the 30th anniversary celebration, Jeanet Sybenga, current director of the IFC, told CC, "Having participation from a number of young women and a 7-year-old girl was a real sign of hope for me. It is exciting to see the growth and development of our community. God's Spirit is alive and present at the Indian Family Centre."

According to Sybenga, one of the main aspects of IFC's ministry

is to provide hospitality — a safe place free from drugs, alcohol, and violence. Though some people drop by just to use the phone, read the newspaper, or have a cup of coffee or tea, others stay all day. Many come to use the centre's photocopier, fax machine, and community computers for their job searches or other purposes.

Pastoral care and counseling are also provided, sometimes formally and scheduled in advance, but mostly spontaneously as needs arise. The staff also refer people to other community agencies that render services that IFC doesn't provide, such as food banks, clothing needs, and housing help.

The IFC also supports families and individuals in various ways. Some people need help dealing with institutional systems, such as social services, children and family services, and the justice system. The centre is also used as a place where parents, whose children have been placed in foster care, can regularly visit their offspring.

Embracing aboriginal gifts

Central to the weekly schedule at IFC is the Thursday morning Worship Circle, followed by a lunch of soup and bannock. Participation ranges from 8-30 people. Following the pattern set in the ministry's early days, participants read Scripture, discuss and reflect on the passage, share their thoughts, struggles, and joys, and conclude with prayer.

"The circle gives focus to our week and strengthens us for the challenges we face each day," Sybenga said. "Because our community is an aboriginal community, we incorporate the gifts of aboriginal culture and spiritual

Politics

Iraq's Assyrian Christians anxious about their future

Of Iraq's 24 million people between 700,000 and 1 million are Christians, and their numbers are dwindling. Some 30 percent of emigrants leaving Iraq belong to this small minority. Under Saddam, since they were no political threat, they were left alone, free to import Bibles and other literature and to worship without government interference. Today, with Islamists attempting to establish themselves and the restraints of dictatorship gone, they feel themselves very vulnerable. They fear the future.

Their plight has been highlighted by the fact that at the beginning of this year, a group of Muslim intellectuals and political leaders in the country had to call on their fellow Muslims to stop attacks on Christians and to stop forcing women to wear the veil. They pointed out that Christians had lived in Iraq for two thousand years and had contributed greatly to the country's civilization even before the rise of Islam.

Father Nizar Semaan, a Syrian Orthodox priest, told Zenith: "There is a danger that we Christians may have to choose between remaining in Iraq as second-class citizens deprived of our rights, or leaving this land of our fathers."

Who are these Iraqi Christians?

Close to 80 percent of Iraq's Christians are Chaldeans and Assyrians, some affiliated with the Catholic Church and some not. Their language is Aramaic, the language of Jesus (heard in Gibson's *Passion* film). They trace their origins back to the early church

and the missionary work of St. Thomas in the area then known as Assyria. They began to follow the teachings of Nestorius, who taught that Christ is a man who was elevated to divinity. This doctrine of incarnation was declared heretical and the church broke with the church of Rome. One thousand years later, part of the Chaldean church rejoined the Catholic church, keeping their own rite, and became known as Uniate Catholics.

Arab Muslim invaders captured Mesopotamia in 630 A.D. and the Assyrian people fell under Muslim domination. Over the centuries they were subjected to repeated forced conversions, children being taken away from parents to be raised as Muslims. In the 17th century in some areas Christians were forced to convert or be killed. During their long history, they were subject to continuous persecution and repeated massacres.

Chaldean Christians speak of an Assyrian holocaust that happened during the early twentieth century, when some 750,000 people – men, women and children – were systematically slaughtered in the area now spanned by several countries. "In the space of one decade, the Christian population of the regions that now constitute the Republic of Turkey went from some five million souls to less than 700,000. This figure has since fallen to less than 200,000," writes one historian of the holocaust.

Many fled, and as a result there are now some 3.2 million Assyrians living abroad, including strong communities of Iraqi Christians in the US.

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teachings. Over the years there has been discernment done in how to embrace and incorporate the aboriginal gifts. We believe that the Creator has given many beautiful gifts to the aboriginal people, gifts that can enhance and enrich our Christian faith and worship."

At the anniversary celebration, Leo Beaulieu, a Native pastoral development worker at IFC who has worked at the centre for 20 years, expressed his appreciation for the church's presence in his life and community: "I've always wanted to have a forum to say, as an aboriginal person, thank you to the people in the pews. Thank you to God and to the people who give

so freely to us. That life that flows through me, I pass to others."

The celebrative evening concluded with a gift exchange. Sybenga and Barbara Shoomski, board chair of the IFC, presented T-shirts emblazoned with artwork from a local aboriginal artist to the hard-working organizers of the anniversary event. IFC staff received jackets or paintings by local artists. The IFC received a hand drum from the staff of the CRC's Native Healing Centre in Edmonton and a beautiful framed print from the Indian Metis Christian Fellowship.

Throughout 30 years God has clearly used the IFC, a sanctuary in a harsh environment, to heal

France and headscarves

Late last year French President Jacques Chirac proposed controversial legislation that would ban, among other things, Muslim women from wearing headscarves in public schools and government buildings in that country. This measure enjoys widespread support among French citizens, despite its apparent violation of the religious freedom of its minority Islamic community. Not surprisingly, it has infuriated Muslims around the world. To make the proposed law seem more equitable, the ban will also cover yarmulkes, oversized crosses and other obvious religious symbols. As of this writing the legislation has just received overwhelming approval by the National Assembly and is expected to sail through the Senate with no difficulty.

How is it possible that a constitutional democracy claiming to guarantee the rights of its citizens can adopt such a law? Chirac himself locates the proposal within the tradition of what the French call *laïcité*, or secularism: "Secularism is one of the Republic's great achievements. It plays a crucial role in social harmony and national cohesion. We must not allow it to be weakened." Since 1905 church and state have been separated, and official republican doctrine declares that state institutions, including schools and universities, must be religion-free zones. Thus anyone attempting to bring their religious particularities into the public square must be stopped at the door before they do irreparable damage to *laïcité*.

The controversy engendered by this proposal even caught the attention of the US State Department, which raised concern in December over its infringement of religious freedom. Given the chilly relations between Washington and Paris over the former's Iraq policy, it is doubtful that the French government will heed these expressed concerns. Moreover, last month Ayman al-Zawahiri, an aide to Osama bin Laden, condemned the measure, citing it as yet another example of "the crusader envy that the westerners have against Muslims." Implicit in these remarks is the threat



Principalities & Powers

David T. Koyzis

of terrorist reprisals against France.

In fact, France is not the only country to adopt or consider such measures. The German federal states of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg are considering similar bans, and the country's highest court has explicitly permitted them. A contact in the Netherlands has recently told me that even in his country, with its tradition of confessional pluralism and tolerance, there is support for the French law, which he himself favors.

One senses from Europeans that immigrants from especially the Islamic world are not assimilating into the host countries very well. Indeed some of the rhetoric suggests very nearly a state of on-going warfare between the immigrant and host communities. There can, of course, be no general right of people from one part of the world to move to a host country and set up a miniature version of their country of origin, with no intention of contributing to the common life of their new home. This is what we would call colonization, a phenomenon that supposedly died with the end of the imperial age after the Second World War. If this is what immigrants from Islamic countries are indeed doing, then perhaps the receiving countries need to re-evaluate their own immigration policies and make adjustments accordingly.

Where individual members of immigrant communities have committed actual crimes, these need to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. But legally proscribing the wearing of headscarves in public buildings on the somewhat flimsy grounds of guaranteeing equality is a needlessly provocative gesture that would effectively criminalize an entire community for simply living out the precepts of its common faith. Where is the justice in that?

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(With files from Aiden Enns, Jeanet Sybenga, and Henk DeBruyn)

Editorial

Security: between warfare and welfare

Harry der Nederlanden

Kairos, a peace organization of which the CRC is also a member, has come out with a strong statement against militarism, directed largely against the additional measures our government (and that of the US) has taken to provide extra security after 9-11 against terrorism. Our security – personal, national and global – does not depend on weapons, Kairos declares. To which all Christians can respond with a hearty Amen!

The trouble is that the Kairos statement is issued at a time when Canadians hear once again that our armed forces are woefully underfunded. The state of the equipment on which our soldiers stake their lives has long been fodder for cartoonists and comedians. Our soldiers, however, are not laughing.

Recently it took one of our Sea King helicopters 16 days to travel from one end of the country to the other. A previous one took almost twice as long. The *National Post* reported that there are not enough planes to deal with Canada's commitments to the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) while simultaneously handling overseas operations.

"The Canadian military is so short of funding for its network of bases, barracks and other facilities that the army cannot afford to repair or even demolish some of its more rundown buildings, the navy cannot keep one of its ageing destroyers afloat and the air force has been reduced to asking airmen at one of its biggest bases to take afternoons off to save on electricity," writes Chris Wattie in another *Post* article.

Dangers north and south

Canada's leaders keep bragging about our international reputation as peacekeepers. But that respect was earned in a prior era – before we stripped the armed forces of every-

thing except large rolls of duct tape to hold their equipment together.

We might do better to emulate Switzerland and get rid of our military altogether. Then we could use the gun registry as an ad hoc source of instant conscripts in case we're ever invaded.

Of course, with the Great White North left unprotected, one day we're liable to wake up and find that our northern territories as far south as Grand Prairie and Winnipeg have been taken over by Greenland. Perhaps that wouldn't raise a great furor in Ottawa, however. Our politicians don't pay attention to the cold parts of the country except during elections when it is time for photo opps. It's always cool to appear in the papers wearing a fur-trimmed parka surrounded by aboriginal drummers. Besides, Greenland would probably issue free permits to Canadian politicians on photo opp junkets to the North. They're a great source of revenue.

But I was only funnin' about Greenland. We all know that our only really dangerous neighbor is to the south. The US has been voted such by the peace-loving Europeans, who lived under the security of its weaponry the entire second half of the 20th century. More and more Canadians are agreeing with the Europeans that America (under Bush) is the most dangerous country in the world. They don't, however, draw the obvious conclusion that therefore we need more troops to defend our common border. Maybe they assume that our soldiers are so superior that if we spread them out along the border at one-mile intervals, they can hold off anything the US throws at us.

But, no, that's not the way our intellectuals reason; they reason that since we live next to the most dangerous country in the world, we can entrust our security to our ferocious neighbor.

Let the Yankee imperialists pay for the tanks and missiles. We'll put our money into healthcare and the gun registry instead. Then we can pat ourselves on the back that, unlike the Americans, we have our priorities right. Question: which people are morally superior – those who spend most on killing machines or those who spend most on healing machines? Right. And to which category do we Canadians belong? Right again. Therefore Canadians are morally superior to Americans.

Some believe a morally superior civilization will always (in the long run) triumph over a nasty one. Still, one populated by gun-carrying obese people on diets won't be a pushover. I can't imagine a more lethal combination.

What Americans don't realize is that us morally superior folks have developed our own strategy of domination. If present immigration trends continue, America will eventually be overrun by peaceniks like us. Canadian immigrants to the US coming down from the north will meet Mexican infiltrators coming up from the south, and before you can say "Hillary," universal health care will triumph over star wars and missiles. In fact, before you can say "National Rifle Association" there will be a gun registry modeled after Canada's (that will take up half the defense budget), and the gun-toting US we all love to hate (and immigrate to) will be no more.

Security in many forms

But enough visionary stuff. Kairos is right: not all the guns and missiles in the world will give us security.

One thing Kairos fails to add is that more bucks invested in doctors and nurses, radiation and MRI machines won't give us more security either. More investment in welfare agencies to prevent spanking, pre-school programs to liberate mothers, higher unemployment and pension payouts won't provide greater security either. In the West we have succeeded in guaranteeing ourselves and our kids more

and more of everything to give ourselves peace of mind. And we're more anxious than ever. Soon we will be dishing up free drugs like ritalin and prozac so no one will get too agitated by his or her sense of emptiness and aimlessness and we will feel pacified and secure.

Even without armed forces and weapons.

Security is one of those words as wide as a sugar maple. It covers a lot, but in doing so it also casts some things in shadow. Almost all the things we erect around us – from our gardens and homes to our governments and insurance corporations – are designed to provide us and ours with greater degrees of security. A huge share of our energies and aspirations are invested in building up and maintaining this vast institutional network of security. In many ways, the quest for security is at the heart of what we call Western civilization.

Biblical people are regularly exhorted not to put their trust – their ultimate security – in any of these things. Not in weapons (horses and chariots). Not in science and technology. Not in government programs. Not in education. Not in art. Not even in agriculture (food and drink). Consider the lilies of the field....

Some of the most popular plays in the Middle Ages featured the coming of Death. Step by inexorable step, Mankind or Everyman learns that all the precious things he erected around himself to guarantee his security in this life avail him nothing in the face of Death. In one morality play, all he can rely on in the end are the good works he has stored up in heaven. Later Luther took this spiritual striptease even further, stripping Everyman even of his good works. Some Calvinists even went Luther one better, stripping him even of faith as a human act.

A naked man is, of course, what human history begins with. But this is not just a naked man; this is a man who has been stripped naked. This is not a good starting point for civilization – as the history of Western reflection demonstrates.

A stripped man feels vulnerable, ashamed, fearful. He may look like Adam in his state of innocence, but he's not. He's not simply a naked man; he's a man who was stripped naked and humiliated. As a result, he's angry, aggressive. He's a brutish, dangerous creature. He's a savage.

Some have assumed that since civilized men and women are often miserable, the savage is probably happier, surrounded as he is by the lilies of the field. Others have tried to dress him up in good manners and pass him off as the most gentle of men. Still others fancy that all he needs is a good education whether in the sciences or the humanities. Just keep him away from sharp objects.

The Bible is more realistic. It puts a sword in his hand. But that's because the Bible does not begin with a man stripped of everything. Even after the fall, God gives him family, culture, moral codes, law, government – a structure of relationships that prods him to be a neighbor to others and a steward of the earth. He does all the things human beings do to sustain themselves with a sword in his hand. Not directly, as so many Americans assume. Between the hand and the sword, there is government, authority, office, obedience, cooperation. But the sword is there, and it cannot be wished away or stripped away. That is to wish away an essential part of government.

It is good that Kairos and other Christian organizations work for peace, and we do well to support them. But the strategy of always playing off one legitimate mode of security against another – police or military against healthcare or welfare – is not helpful. It is subversive of one of the legitimate functions of good government – to protect, not just here at home but also in Africa, Afghanistan and Haiti.

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Letters

How redemptive is Gibson's Passion?

Dear Editor:

I don't get it.

We lament the prevalence of increasingly graphic reality shows, but the Christian community is asked to endorse *The Passion of the Christ*, perhaps the most brutally graphic movie ever filmed because it is so "real" in portraying the scourging and crucifixion of Jesus.

We lament the increase of violence in the media and in our society, but Christian leaders are urged to encourage church members to invite their neighbors to take a front row seat for a blow by blow blood-splattering view of the most violent execution of all time.

We shake our head at parents who take their children along to AA and PG rated films where they experience things they should not see and hear, but Christian parents will probably allow, if not encourage, older children and young people to see this "R" rated film when it is released on DVD because it will "transform" their lives.

I just don't get it.

The violence in this movie is not gratuitous, we were told at the screening I attended. In fact, we were told, if the film is rated "R", let the "R" stand for "Real" and "Redemptive."

But how real was this portrayal of Christ's suffering?

Ask any doctor or nurse in ICU what a couple of punches to the head can do, or

what a scourging like Jesus received in this movie would do. They will tell you that any victim of the kind of brutality acted out in this film would never be able to stand on his own again, as Jesus did before Pilate in this movie or carry two eight foot 6 x 8 barn beams even a metre, much less the many painful metres that Jesus did in this movie. You cannot portray such brutal treatment in the name of reality and then expect the audience to suspend reality and believe that such treatment is survivable. In my opinion, Mel Gibson's gory portrayal of Christ's flogging scenes was "unreal" and entered the realm of gratuitous violence.

And how redemptive is this movie?

At our screening we were told what a shame it would be if the church did not recognize and support this film as a once in a lifetime evangelistic tool. Take your neighbor to it, we were challenged. Miss this opportunity, and your neighbor may miss out on Christ's redemption, we were told. And so we, the battered spectators, experienced the ultimate irony. A film touted as redemptive because it showed the price Jesus paid to erase guilt became a vehicle for increasing our guilt if we dared to leave the building unwilling to bring our neighbors to the Feb. 25 release.

For me the "R" rating of Mel Gibson's film will stand for "Relentless Brutality."

Rarely have I seen a movie that offered so little relief from the mental and emotional

battering that it inflicted on the viewer.

Think about the gospel accounts. Each of the four gospels devotes only two of many other chapters to Christ's physical and mental anguish. Each gospel writer described Jesus' suffering in ways that said everything while guarding our spirits from similar abuse. Most importantly, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John resolved the unbearable conflict of the cross with a resurrection scene that allows one to close each gospel with unspeakable hope and joy. "The Passion", on the other hand, subjected me to an intense, graphic, in your face, unrelenting depiction of a Roman execution, offering neither the proportion of the rest of the story nor the much needed relief of the risen Christ.

So will I take my neighbor? No, I will not. I could not imagine subjecting someone to such a violent experience.

Would I see it again myself? Not on your life. I don't want or need the disturbing images that now come unbidden to my mind. The Christ I follow dealt with the horror of the cross so I would not have to.

Am I sorry that I went? No, only because now when I warn people about what to expect if they go, I will be speaking from my own nightmarish experience rather than someone else's enthusiastic zeal.

Peter Slofstra

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Will the Prime Minister fight for public justice?

The shocking headlines about the Liberal government's failures to deal effectively with its "Quebec sponsorship" scandals and the irresponsible spending practices are historic!

The betrayals of public trust have overshadowed the Liberals' evasion of public responsibility for their continued non-compliance with the clear intent of the Employment Insurance Act.

Why do the Liberals refuse to heed the repeated warnings by Auditor-General Sheila Fraser to address her serious concerns about the growing surplus in the Employment Insurance Account?

According to the Auditor-General, the accumulated Employment Insurance surplus increased by another \$3 billion to \$44 billion in the 2002-3 fiscal year. She reports that this surplus "is now three times larger than the maximum amount required according to the Chief Actuary of Human Resources Development Canada."

Ms. Fraser is rightly urging the federal government "to take all the necessary steps to resolve this long-standing issue."

In her 2003 Report, the Auditor-General reminds Parliament that the 1996 reform of the Act "was redesigned to promote stronger attachments to the labor force and to introduce stronger insurance principles into the system, with a view to softening the impact on low-income families with children."

In view of the worsening plight of numerous vulnerable families with voiceless children, and other poverty-stricken Canadians (many of whom are homeless), the Prime Minister and his fellow Liberals (with the active support of the opposition parties) should immediately introduce substantial budget measures to eradicate these grave injustices.

Since the Employment Insurance and federal budget surpluses keep rising, Ottawa should now use them wisely to help eradicate inexcusable poverty.

Will the PM now demonstrate his commitment to integrity? Will he act to eliminate poverty?

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Palestinians dispossessed

Dear Editor:

Harry Mennega tries to put the conflict between Arabs and Jews as a religious struggle, but that is secondary. The struggling is done by deposed Palestinians, removed from villages, land and heritage by a foreign people.

Although Harry makes light of or rejects the idea of Arabs and Jews being 'semitic cousins,' he does not highlight the Jewish writers Arthur Koestler (*The thirteenth Tribe*), Michael Ashari (*Living Jewish*), Solomon Grayzel (*A History of the Jews*) and Max Dimont (*Jews, God and History*) who put the descent of Jews mostly as of Kharzani/Turkish and other non-semitic origin.

My recipe for peace in the Middle East is the removal of Zionism (both Jewish and

Christian), move the border back to the Green line and compensate the Palestinians who lost their world. Compensation to be done by all regimes which were behind the formation of the state of Israel.

As I write, (February 22) a news report shows a young Palestinian blew himself up. He is called a terrorist. The person who settles on Palestinian land is called a settler and protected by sophisticated weaponry. The Israeli army is moving in to destroy the home of this 'terrorist's' parents.

The clock can't be set back but settlements can and should.

I keep hoping for peace.

Jerry Stehouwer

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Review

The Mystic River of violence

Harry der Nederlanden

Almost all the reviewers of Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* remarked on the graphic and extraordinary violence in that film, some even speaking of "sadism" and a "pornography of violence." Pointing to some of Gibson's earlier films like *Braveheart* and *The Patriot*, which also include some very bloody scenes, a few wondered whether he was a bit fixated on violence. Perhaps. But it's hardly a purely personal fixation. American films have long featured violence as a major theme. And I'm not just talking about second-rate cowboy, cop and creep movies.

Three films nominated for awards that I have seen this year – *Master and Commander*, *Mystic River*, and *Cold Mountain* – all not only have scenes of great violence but are to some degree meditations on violence. Perhaps *Lord of the Rings* could be included here as well.

In two of the films this is hardly surprising, since they are set during wartime – *Master and Commander* in England's war with France and *Cold Mountain* in the American Civil War – but settings are chosen, not thrust upon writers. Both of these films have a tragic tone, even a somewhat fatalistic one. Despite the virtue and the obvious longing for peace in the main characters, their lives are inevitably swept up into the violence of their world.

War and violence

One of the unforgettable scenes in *Master and Commander* is that of the captain and the doctor joined in profound friendship, sitting together in the cabin of a warship playing a violin and cello duet that eloquently expresses the longing for a peaceful, civilized life. There they are, however, on "the far side of the world" locked in mortal combat with a ship that (we are encouraged to think) is a mirror image of their own community. For them to seek to destroy one another thousands of miles away from either country seems to make little sense – except that each is a proxy for its own country. Even if they were on the far side of the moon, and even if they both face an enemy greater than either – the sea and the elements – duty commands them to seek one another's destruction.

In *Cold Mountain* a coura-



Sean Penn as Jimmy

geous soldier, after being wounded in battle, is so sickened by the carnage and so filled with longing for home and the woman he loves that he deserts. In his long quest for peace and love, however, violence dogs his every step. The barbarity, bloodiness and violence isn't just at the front (the film opens with the bloodiest massacre of the Civil War), but it has spread like a plague to contaminate even the peaceful valley that is the object of his longings. Only the family meal at the end of the film, which has an almost sacramental quality, keeps the film from being a total tragedy.

Violence in a small neighborhood

Mystic River, too, has a tragic tone. That two such films should make it to the screen from Hollywood in the same year is itself remarkable in an industry addicted to happy endings. But the film is remarkable too for its artistry. It has a certain allegorical quality like the crowd-pleaser *Sea Biscuit*. In that film, however, the allegorical connections between the wounded, struggling trio (trainer, jockey, horse) coming up out of obscurity against all odds and the working classes stricken by the depression is obvious. *Mystic River* is more subtle, working on several levels to examine the insidious effects of abuse and violence in a small community. The film may be seen as a meditation on original sin.

I'm not suggesting that it is a film rooted in a Christian view of things

like the Lord of the Rings, but it probes deeply at the roots of that heart of darkness that shatters human lives. There are a lot of allusions to religion in the film, but they tend to implicate it in the violence. The story begins with a short flashback or prequel of the lives of three men to when they were boys playing street hockey in a typical working-class neighborhood. One of the boys is abducted by two men and sexually molested.

One of the abusers is wearing a ring emblazoned with a cross and wears a crucifix around his neck. No doubt these shots are meant to remind us of the scandal in the Catholic Church in which numerous priests have abused altar boys. Not that the man is actually shown to be a priest, but the connection is hinted at.

The murder of the oldest daughter of one of the three men, Jimmy, the center of the plot, happens when her younger sister is preparing for her first communion in the local Catholic church. When Jimmy's youngest daughter is walking down the aisle in a white dress, the picture of innocence, his older daughter is lying battered and dead in the "bear pit" of an abandoned zoo. The film is about violence entering the world of innocence, questioning the very possibility of innocence in a world like ours.

Why?

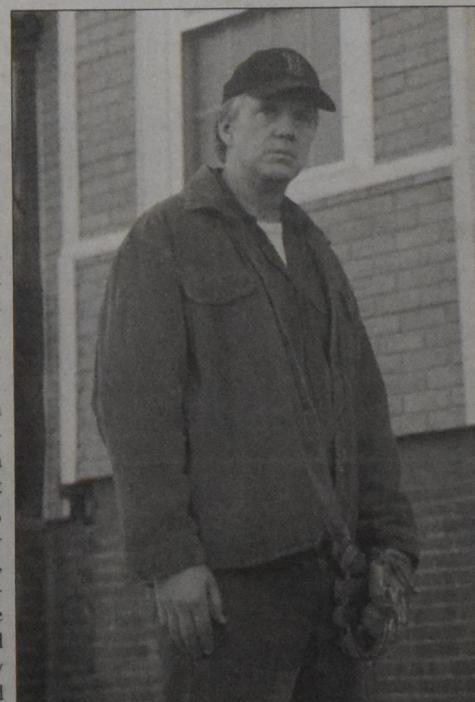
At crucial points in the film, the camera pans to the sky as if to address a question to heaven, and at

lated. Although they are all fully realized characters, masterfully individualized, they are also types: one doomed to play the victim, one to wield the knife and one to seek out the truth and restore justice, if anyone can.

All three men have wives who play very different roles in their lives. The cop is separated from his wife, a traumatized woman who phones him but cannot speak. Jimmy, the grieving, raging father, has a wife who acts like Lady Macbeth, telling him that his willingness to wreak vengeance is what makes him strong and keeps his family safe, protected. "You could rule this town," she tells her husband, and we see in the vengeful father the lineaments of a king of the underworld. Dave, the abused, wounded, passive victim, has been rendered strange, somewhat unbalanced by his childhood abuse. His strangeness, his wounds, make his wife suspect that he may be the murderer, for on the night of the murder he came home covered with blood. She does not believe his story that he got into a fight with a mugger. All the relationships are also wounds, and they are linked indirectly with the primal abuse scene as well as the murder.

Muteness

One of the ways they are linked is through the theme of muteness.



Tim Robbins as Dave

Love thy neighbor? Maybe not

After Dave escapes his abusers and returns home, he is hidden away in his room and the shade drawn. What happened to him is too shameful to talk about, it is unspeakable. His friends lose contact with him; it is as if he is contaminated, contagious, and must be avoided.

Nevertheless, Dave's two boyhood friends who saw him being driven away are also deeply wounded by the incident. Although they themselves were not abducted, their lives were infected by fear and guilt. Their innocence has been forever lost. We suspect that the roles they are playing now in adulthood are linked with that experience, not in a sociological way, but in a metaphysical way. A chasm of evil, of violence, opened up beneath them, and it could have been any one of them who was sucked in. This is the world of 9-11, in which evil can strike anywhere at any time.

Even as an adult Dave has not been able to speak of the terrible thing that has cast a shadow over his life, not even to his wife. And it is this inability to speak of it that makes him strange and a stranger to his wife. She suspects he may be capable of dark deeds, for he lives on the edge of a dark world, dark memories.

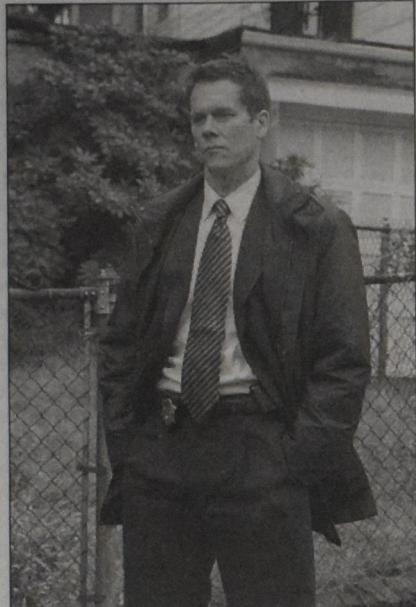
The policeman's wife is also alienated from him, wanting to contact him, but unable to speak. Why is not made clear in the film, but the one note of hope is that the policeman does not give up. He patiently waits her out.

There is also a mute boy in the film; he is the younger brother of the murdered girl's boyfriend. His muteness, too, is a result of a childhood trauma. He looks like an innocent kid, but he too is defined by violence, by fear and anger.

Jimmy, too, has a secret of which he cannot speak. It is directly related in the past to the muteness of the young boy, the brother of his daughter's boyfriend.

Blood ties

So the lives of everyone in the story are bound together by ties rooted in violence, deep wounds and muteness. At the end of the film, the



Kevin Bacon as Sean, the policeman

survivors, the deeply wounded survivors, meet on the community's main street. It is a national holiday and a parade goes by with flags and the famous American minute men. And the theme of violence reverberates far beyond the small working class community across America and American history.

Although *Mystic River* is far from being a Christian film in its bleak, though not entirely hopeless, conclusion, it does prompt us to reflect more deeply on "the mystery of iniquity" in suggestive ways. We have too much rationalized and individualized sin and its effects, as if specific acts are followed by specific consequences almost in a cause-effect relationship.

This film reminds me of more primal Old Testament notions of sin and guilt and violence. The brokenness of human existence is much more pervasive and "accidental," sometimes visiting its suffering and darkness on people with the randomness of disease.

Churches have encouraged members to use Gibson's *Passion* as a stimulus to the discussion of biblical themes. A film like *Mystic River* raises questions that can open out to the gospel every bit as effectively, for it begs the question, How are we to break free out of this dark current, this mystic river of violence that flows through our community leaving darkness and destruction in its wake? Are even our attempts to protect ourselves and ours from it doomed to replicate the violence and spread the contagion?

David van der Woerd

Organizations whose mandate includes providing care to vulnerable persons may think twice about applying the adage "Love Thy Neighbor" after reading what happened to a church that tried to assist a female member work through wreckage of childhood abuse by her father.

A recent Ontario Superior Court decision underscores the volatility of the current climate for churches and other charities that deal with vulnerable persons. The case is cited as *Boer v. Cairns*, 2003.

A woman told her church elder that her father had sexually abused her as a child. The church counseled her to confront the problem using internal church processes. This required her to confront her father in the presence of her mother and other church elders, followed by an appearance before the church's judicial committee. The litigation erupted eight years later – against the church. The woman sued for the psychological damage done to her as a result of those church meetings.

Extending limitations

While the case wanders through a myriad of issues, I will only touch on a few specific points of interest. The first is the remarkable lengths that the court will go through to come to the assistance of an abuse victim. This case had the potential of not being heard at all because of the Ontario Limitations Act, which prevents persons from advancing claims in court for negligence after six years has passed from the time the event occurred.

Nevertheless, in child abuse cases, the Supreme Court of Canada effectively abolished the application of the Limitations Act by creating a "discoverability rule." This rule assumes that victims of childhood abuse only discover the connection between their injuries and the wrong done to them after some form of psychotherapy. As such, the limitation period for advancing claims resulting from the child abuse does not commence until the person has realized the damage suffered by them, after treatment has been administered to them. This can be many years after the actual events occurred – effectively doing away with the Limitations Act in child abuse cases.

In this case the court even went one step further.

Keep in mind, the court was not considering the father's liability for

his abusive conduct, but the church's, for its response to the abuse. Previously, the Supreme Court applied the discoverability rule to extend the beginning of the limitation period to permit a victim to advance a claim against an abuser. In this case the court applied the discoverability rule to extend it against the church, which responded to the abuse years later. The abuse occurred when the victim was a child. The victim disclosed the abuse to her church as an adult. Eight years later, the church was found liable for the negligent manner in which it responded to the disclosures, because the court extended the discoverability rule beyond the abuser, to the church.

This underscores how the court will stretch the law to come to the aid of abuse victims.

Erasing the boundary between church and state

The next point of interest from the case shows how the invisible boundary between church and state has been erased so that the court now shows little restraint in interfering in internal church matters where it deems it justifiable. In this particular case, part of the rationale for finding liability against the church rested on the court's conclusion that the clergy's interpretation of the Bible was, in the eyes of the court, incorrect – in effect concluding that the court, not the clergy, has a greater ability to interpret the Bible correctly.

In the past, the courts demonstrated a reluctance to interfere with churches, particularly if they observed their own procedures and policies, but this case shows how the barometric appetite for restraint has changed. As a basis for ruling against the church, the court said the church incorrectly applied its religious policies to a serious abuse case. The court read the operative scriptural passages and interpreted them to apply only to private member disputes dealing with matters such as financial issues, and disagreed with the church's application of them to serious abuse cases, as was the case here.

The limits of religious freedom

The third point of this article relates to the court's reaction to the alleged clergy exemption to malpractice claims. The church wanted the courts to consider regulation of spiritual issues the domain of the

church and off-limits to the courts. It relied upon a line of US judicial authority that recognized a clergy exemption to malpractice claims. Those cases said civil tort claims against clerics require the courts to review and interpret church law, policies or practices, which violates the first amendment to the US Constitution standing for religious freedom.

The court, not the clergy, has a greater ability to interpret the Bible correctly.

The court acknowledged that religious freedoms also exist in Canada in our Charter of Rights, but dismissed the argument that worked as a bar for the courts to intervene in spiritual matters. The court said that religious freedom is not absolute, particularly where the situation involves the discipline of church members. When the exercise of religious beliefs adversely affects the rights of others, the courts will intervene.

So the case has three intriguing points of interest: 1) it extended the discoverability rule beyond child abusers to others who committed additional damage after the abuse, 2) it diminished the power of the church to regulate its own policies and procedures, and 3) it showed a distinction in the application of religious freedoms in Canada context as opposed to the US, even when the freedoms appear to directly overlap.

The case would seem to be fertile ground for an appeal, but it has not gone there. This is good news and bad news. The bad news is that in our common law system, judicial decisions make law. The good news is that none of the pronouncements in this case were made by a higher court, so to the extent that the decision or the facts can be distinguished from decisions by our higher courts, the value of the decision in establishing legal precedent may be limited.

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Church

Vietnam's Christians savor small victories

LOS ANGELES (Compass) — In recent months, Protestants in Vietnam have seen intense activity on the religious rights' front involving the country's house churches, the worldwide evangelical Christian network, Western diplomats, human rights organizations and journalists.

Activists can point to several instances of government concession. A few observers see winds of change blowing, but most remain skeptical. Four incidents appear to have had a positive ending.

Apology for abuse

In a September 2003 petition to central authorities in Ho Chi Minh City, Baptist house church leader Huynh Tan Tai of the province of Binh Duong documented a series of abuses he had suffered. Last month just before the Lunar New Year (Tet), local officials apologized to him and returned Bibles and other materials they had confiscated. However, they were not prepared to document their apology in writing, as requested by the house church.

Binh Duong province is said to be vigorously courting foreign investment.

Residence papers

In October 2003, rights activists published the six-year-long saga of persecution of Hre minority Christian leader Dinh Van Hoang and his family in central Vietnam. The story carried the original copy of Hoang's application for official residence papers. Local officials returned the application, signed and sealed, and bearing a message that they would consider his application only if he gave up his Christian religion. An American official showed senior Vietnamese officials the document and accompanying story during an October 2003 visit.

Within a month, provincial officials called on Hoang and suggested he could have complained to them that he experienced difficulties with local administrators. (Hoang had complained, but without success). They also asked him how he had managed to give the documents to foreigners.

According to reports, the local officials involved in issuing residence denial have since been transferred. Local Christian leaders believe that this was not because they had violated Hoang's rights, but

because they were naive enough to record on paper that recanting religious belief was a prerequisite for acquiring legal residence.

Reports indicate that the new local officials are more lenient. Hoang has resumed meeting with a small congregation in his simple home, but still has not received his official residence documents.

Youth released

In Ho Chi Minh City, about 20 young people were arrested on or around December 9 for distributing Christian literature during the Southeast Asia Games. Activist pastor Nguyen Hong Quang responded by leading about 30 Christians in a noisy sit-in and prayer vigil at a police station. Several senior city officials could not end the protest.

Police appealed to leaders of the Vietnam Evangelical Fellowship to help end the stand-off. In exchange for stopping the protest, Fellowship house church leaders secured the release of all the detainees and the return of all their personal effects, along with an apology from the police.

The police also offered surprisingly heartfelt thanks for the church leaders' intervention. With the SEA Games in progress and alerted foreign reporters poking around, officers were at a loss about resolving the crisis.

At press time, the persons involved in the literature distribution and those participating in the protest have not faced reprisals.

Pastor beaten

In January, Compass released several reports on the trial of Rev. Bui Van Ba. Police invaded a prayer event at the Ba home in Ho Chi Minh City last August and beat Rev. Ba for attempting to take his wife, who had fainted during the altercation, to get medical treatment. Officers took Ba to a local police station, tied him up and detained him in a cell without food, water or clothing for 36 hours before releasing him to house arrest.

To Ba's surprise, he was charged in late December with "resisting an officer doing his duty" and summoned to a criminal trial.

His house church colleagues protested vigorously to local authorities, enlisting international help as well. Journalists and diplomats expressed considerable interest. Only 48 hours before the trial was

Paul and Luke on Malta

"There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably. His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. They honored us in many ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed." (Acts 28:7-10, NIV).

This passage tells us of two episodes of healing, first Paul healing the father of Publius (the Roman official who was in charge of Malta, the island on which Paul and his companions had landed after being shipwrecked), and then the healing of the other sick on the island. To the casual Bible reader it may seem as though the first is much like the second, a miraculous healing through the prayer and laying on of hands of the apostle Paul. But if we take a closer look, we notice that there are significant differences in the way Luke (the author of the book of Acts) describes these two episodes of healing.

Significantly different verbs

To begin with, there is a difference in the verbs that are used. The first episode speaks of "healing" (Greek *iaomai*), the second of "curing" (Greek *therapeuo*, related to our word "therapy"). Although these verbs are synonymous in English, they are not quite the same in Greek, since the second one can also mean "treat medically," whether or not this treatment leads to a cure.

Secondly, the verbs are contrasted by being in the active and passive voice: "healed" and "were cured (treated)." The active voice requires that the agent of the action is explicitly named: "Paul healed;" the passive voice lets the agent go unmentioned. We do not know through whose agency the rest of Malta's sick were cured or treated; Luke leaves that unexpressed.

Thirdly, the tense of the two verbs is also different, although this difference is not reflected in the English translation. The tense of the verb "healed" in Greek is the so-called "aorist," indicating a one-time action in the past. The tense of the verb "were cured (treated)" in Greek is the imperfect, indicating ongoing or repeated action. Paul's healing of Publius' father was a single event; the

scheduled to begin, Rev. Ba was served with a postponement notice. At present, house church leaders are asking that charges against Ba be dropped and for the police to be charged instead.

International image

The fact that officials have apparently backed away from harassing Christians is a new phenomenon. Sources in the country believe their actions are motivated by Vietnam's

Chapter & Verse

Al Wolters



curing or treatment of the other sick was a process, possibly including many separate actions over a period of time.

Luke takes up his profession

In my opinion, the reason why Luke describes the two healing episodes in these different ways is that he himself was personally involved in the second episode. Luke was a doctor, and during the months that he and Paul were on Malta he applied his medical skill to the treatment of the sick on the island. By using the verb *therapeuo* he indicates that he treated the sick, although it is possible that not all of his patients were cured. By putting this verb in the passive voice, without indication of agent, he modestly steps out of the limelight himself. By putting the verb in the imperfect tense, he signals that his medical activity extended over a period of time.

What strengthens this interpretation is Luke's use of the pronoun "us" in this narrative. Clearly, this does not refer to all his shipmates, since these numbered 276 (Acts 27:37), and such a large company could not have been put up in Publius' house. The "us" must refer to a much smaller number. We can be certain that it included at least Paul (who had emerged as the leader of the ship's company) and his companion, the physician Luke. When the text goes on to say, "They honored us" and "they furnished us with supplies," it is clear from the Greek that the "they" refers to the sick who had been cured or treated, while the "us" includes at least Paul and Luke — and possibly only them. If I am right in my interpretation, it was especially Luke who was honored and furnished with supplies by his grateful former patients.

In both episodes of healing it is ultimately God who brings restoration of health through the ministrations of his people. I would submit that the difference between them is not that of "supernatural" versus "natural" healing, but different degrees of miraculous unexpectedness in the way God brought about that healing.

Al Wolters teaches Bible and Greek at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario. He and his wife Alice are part of a Bible study group which has recently been studying the book of Acts.



that a fundamental change is coming. Evidence of unrelenting and severe persecution of Vietnam's minority Christians in the Central Highlands and the Northwest provinces confirms this view.

deep concern for its international image. Another reason could be that the newfound unity and resolve among Vietnam's sometimes fractured house churches, along with the rapid response of the Christian community around the world, have caught Vietnamese authorities off-guard.

Church leaders exude growing confidence in their fight for freedom. However, none of the participants in the struggle suggest

Church

Christian mosque building aids unity with Nigerian Muslims

Obed Minchakpu

Jos, Nigeria (ENI) – Christians and Muslims in Nigeria seem to be increasingly reaching out to each others' communities striving for greater harmony in the volatile West African country where religious conflict between the two major faiths in recent years has claimed more than one million lives according to some.

Recent moves for reconciliation include the building of a mosque for Muslims by a Christian political leader, the establishment of places of worship that accommodate both Christians and Muslims, and more dialogue aimed at better relations.

Governor Orji Uzor Kalu, a Christian and governor of the state of Abia in southeastern Nigeria, recently extended a hand of friendship to Muslims by building a mosque in the city of Umuahia, at an estimated cost of about US\$5 million.

"It has to do with humanity and my conscience and my consideration for other religions," said Governor Kalu explaining why he built the mosque with a seating capacity for 2000 worshipers, an Islamic school, a conference hall and other facilities.

The building was declared open by Governor Ibrahim Shekarau, a Muslim and the governor of the northern state of Kano, January 30. Shekarau, speaking at the commissioning of the mosque, described Kalu as a "true and excellent Christian who appreciates the beliefs of other religions".

Governor Shekarau called on all Muslims in Nigeria to respect the religion of other people with whom they live. If this was done, he said, it would mark the beginning of a new era for the 134 million people in the country, of whom about 50 per cent are Muslims and 40 per cent Christians.

"If we respect the religion and culture of one another, we shall live as brothers and sisters for ever," he said.

Other political leaders at the occasion were Alhaji Ahmed Sani, of Zamfara State, the Muslim governor who first introduced in Nigeria the Islamic legal code, known as Sharia, and his counterparts from the states of Yobe and Kebbi. Also in attendance was the Emir of Kano, Alhaji Ado Bayero, a prominent Muslim leader from northern Nigeria.

Reconciliation moves have also been made by individual Christians and churches. Professor Moses Adeniji, a university professor at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria's southwest, built a mosque.

When asked by ENI why he did this, despite the fact that he is a Christian, Adeniji said he was directed by God to build a place of worship for Muslims.

"I am a Christian, but more than 90 per cent of my brothers and sisters [in this area] are Muslims," said Adeniji. "My people do not have a place of worship. So I prayed and God showed me that I should provide them with a place of worship."

Adeniji does not believe it is a contradiction for Christians to help Muslims. "In Islam, Muslims call Jesus the servant of God, while we, Christians call him the Son of God," he said. "In my view, whether Jesus is the Son of God or the servant of God, it means the same."

Anglican and Lutheran churches in Nigeria have taken a key role in reconciliation moves. The Anglican church has established an institution that provides an environment for both Christians and Muslims to study each others' beliefs, while Lutherans hold each year a Christian-Muslim dialogue.

There exist too, places of worship for both Muslims and Christians in some Nigerian cities, built by a religious group known as CHRISLAM, which uses both the Bible and the Quran in its worship.

It is alleged that Sheikh Muhiddin Abdullahi helped channel funds from Saudi Arabia through his Almundata Al-Islam Foundation to Al Sunna wal Jamma.

Elizabeth Kendal

On January 25, 2004, UN Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) reported, "Nigerian security agencies have in the past voiced concerns about the activities of certain Islamic preachers whom they feared were radicalizing Muslims in parts of the north. Many were suspected of having links to terrorist groups and foreign organizations.

"In the aftermath of the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks in New York, several Afghan and Pakistani preachers and other residents were arrested and deported because, according to the authorities, they could not give satisfactory explanations of their mission in Nigeria."

UN IRIN expressed the concern that a recent violent but failed insurrection in the northern state of Yobe by the Wahhabi militant group Al Sunna wal Jamma ("Followers of the Prophet") could be evidence that extremist Islamist ideology and terrorism could become a threat to Nigeria's peace and security.

The recent arrest in Kano of a Sudanese Islamist named Sheikh Muhiddin Abdullahi confirms the fears of analysts who have suspected that the northern sharia states would become an incubator for radical Islamist ideology and a breeding ground for militants.

It is alleged that Sheikh Muhiddin Abdullahi helped channel funds from Saudi Arabia through his Almundata Al-Islam Foundation to Al Sunna wal Jamma.

The Almundata Al-Islam Foundation is a "charity" that builds new

mosques in Nigeria – 42 in Kano).

It promotes Wahabi Islam and is funded by wealthy Saudis. It has been reported that Malam Mohammed Yusuf, who is believed to be the ideological leader of the Al Sunna wal Jamma, has fled to Saudi Arabia. Nigeria has asked Interpol to help apprehend him. Meanwhile, officers of the State Security Service have taken Sheikh Muhiddin Abdullahi and an associate to Abuja for questioning.

Nigerian authorities are now trying to unravel the extensive network of cells through which Islamist militants are being recruited from all across Nigeria and beyond. They are also trying to put together the details of how this group got its weapons and training. The Al Sunna wal Jamma militants in custody in Yobe are mostly well-educated university students and the children of "notable" Nigerians. The police are not releasing their names.

The growing evidence of foreign involvement in Islamist militancy in Nigeria is grounds for concern, especially as UN IRIN points out, "Nigeria was mentioned alongside Jordan, Morocco and Saudi Arabia in a tape purportedly released by Osama bin Laden, the fugitive leader of Al Qaeda, as a country where Muslims need to be liberated."

UN IRIN reports (25 Jan), "Political analysts and security officials fear the emergence of the Al Sunna Wal Jamma (Followers of the Prophet) group may be an indication that extremist Islamic groups have found enough foothold in Nigeria to make Africa's

most populous country a theatre for worse sectarian violence than it has seen in recent years and acts of terrorism.

"What I find striking is that the group had operated in Nigeria for some time, had a cell network of members that included highly educated people and could use weapons," said Ike Onyekwere, a political analyst. "Though they appear to have been put to flight, there is a chance they might still regroup and emerge in another, perhaps more deadly form."

Background: the December 2003 insurrection in Yobe

Toward the end of December 2003, some 200 Muslims of Al Sunna Wal Jamma or "Followers of the Prophet," led by a man calling himself Mullah Omar, invaded two areas of Yobe state. They ransacked the local government headquarters and the police station, killing one local policeman and stealing ammunition. They distributed leaflets complaining that the Yobe state governor, Abba Ibrahim, was corrupt and not complying with shariah (Islamic law).

They then took over a local primary school, renamed it Afghanistan, hoisted their own Afghan flag and sent local residents into forced exile.

Soldiers had to be deployed to contain and eventually quell the insurrection. In the end, the fighting left three policemen and at least a dozen rebels dead. More than 200 Al Sunna Wal Jamma militants have been taken into custody.

This group had also targeted many other villages, leaving at least 10,000 people displaced by the insecurity. The militants designated their base an "Islamic state" and declared that their aim was to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria.

They also vowed to kill all non-Muslims and declared a holy Islamic war on Christians and the national government.

UN IRIN reported January 5, 2004: "The Al Sunna Wal Jamma group has been active in Borno and Yobe states over the past two years, preaching strict adherence to Islamic shariah law and expressing admiration for the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. However, this is the first time they have been known to take up arms."

Christians slain fleeing to church in central Nigeria

Some 49 Christians were massacred by Islamic militants in a raid on the Christian town of Yelwa in Plateau State February 24.

Plateau Police Commissioner Innocent Ilozuoke told reporters most of the victims had been shot as they ran to a church desperately seeking refuge. The attackers are thought to have mainly been ethnic Fulani Muslims. Local security sources indicate that the merciless guerrilla tactics used in the assault suggest Islamist fighters from Chad and Niger may also have been involved.

Local Christians in Plateau State have suffered repeated attacks from ethnic Hausa/Fulani Muslim settlers since September 2001. Hundreds have been killed in the violence. Islamic militants from Chad, Niger and other countries outside of Nige-

ria have repeatedly been involved. Local Christians believe militant elements within the Muslim community are working to a strategy to drive out Christians and Islamise the whole state.

Some reports, however, suggest the conflict may be less religious than ethnic in this area, since most of the people of Yelwa are Muslims.

For decades, the majority Christian inhabitants of Plateau and the minority Muslim population – mostly Hausa and Fulani tribespeople with origins farther north – had lived in harmony.

But tensions between the two communities heightened in the past four years as 12 majority Muslim states in the north adopted the strict shariah, or Islamic, legal codes, perceived by Christians as an expansionist threat.

[Files from Barnabas and Associated Press.]

Reflection

Building Trust

Vicky Van Andel Ed.

JoMae Spoelhof

Imagine this woman. Married yet childless. She is an Israelite living in the days of the judges – about one thousand years before the Angel Gabriel would appear to young Mary the mother of Jesus. And roughly halfway between that event and the announcement of the impending birth of Isaac to aging parents. Only a few centuries have gone by since the children of Israel have been freed from four hundred years of slavery in Egypt. We are given no name for her other than that she is the wife of Manoah of the tribe of Dan.

One day the angel of YHWH comes to her. She is told, "Although you are barren, having borne no children, you shall conceive and bear a son." The angel instructs her to "be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, or to eat anything unclean."

Then come instructions about how to raise her son. "No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from birth. It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines."

What an amazing moment for this woman! Was she afraid? Did she speak?

All we know is what she later tells her husband: that a man of God came to her looking like an angel of God, very awesome. She reports, "I did not ask him where he came from and he did not tell me his name."

In contrast to God's similar announcement to Abraham and Sarah, husband Manoah was not there – not even within ear shot. This wonderful news was delivered to his wife alone. Part of what I admire about this woman though, is that she did not keep this encounter to herself. She goes to Manoah and repeats the information.

There is a sense of companionship and mutual respect among these two. A sense which continues throughout the story – even when Samson is grown and they are concerned about his selection of a wife from among the Philistines. Unable to dissuade him, they go together to meet this girl. And later travel again

Samson's mother – a woman of quiet confidence

to attend the wedding.

Manoah doesn't know

Going back to the announcement, however, it strikes me that Manoah believes his wife's strange tale. He doesn't doubt her or wonder if she is imagining things.

His response is to entreat YHWH to "let the man of God whom you sent come to us again and teach us what we are to do concerning the boy who will be born."

The Bible tells us that "God listened to Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field; but her husband Manoah was not with her."

Clearly the mother of this special child is sought out to be the first line of contact about this important event. This time, however, the woman hurries to get her husband and, coming to the angel, Manoah gets to ask his burning questions.

After verifying that this indeed is the one who had spoken to his wife, he inquires, "Now when your words come true, what is to be the boy's rule of life; what is he to do?"

According to the account we have in Judges 13, Manoah is the only one who speaks to the angel, yet his wife is the only one entrusted with instructions on raising the child and details about his destiny. Twice she is sought out for a visit.

Twice Manoah asks about how to bring up the child. All he is told is to follow the instructions given to his wife. They are not repeated for him, although the angel does repeat for him the food and drink his wife must avoid.

After this conversation, Manoah invites the man of God to stay so they can prepare a kid to

eat. The angel will not eat, but suggests they make a burnt offering to YHWH instead. Manoah then asks for the name of their visitor, who replies, "Why do you ask my name? It is too wonderful." We read that in all of this exchange, Manoah did not know this was the angel of YHWH.

Deeper understanding

Finally, Manoah makes a sacrifice of a young goat and a grain offering.

As the flames rise toward heaven from the altar, their visitor ascends in them and disappears – while the man and his wife fall to their faces on the ground.

At this point Manoah realizes to whom he had been speaking. That this was the angel of YHWH. "We shall surely die, for we have seen God," he says.

But his wife calmly answers, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now announced to us such things as these."

Here we see the deeper understanding of this Israelite mother, her quiet confidence and the respectful camaraderie of this couple. Later, when this woman bears her son, she will name him Samson. He will be a powerful mix of service to God and pain to his parents.

Some have noticed that Samson's mother does not seem to have told Manoah what their child will grow up to do. I wonder why this piece of information entrusted to her seems to have been kept from him at first. I wonder if she was sparing him some worry, as mothers to this day are wont to do.

Did you ever study this articulate woman as a child? Have you heard her story preached? Her life, so honored and sought out by God, celebrated? Would that I, in this era where I am free to speak and think for myself, can model some of her attributes. As a parent, as a partner, and as a woman following the Christ.

Vicky Van Andel is the editor of this column. Anyone who would like to contribute to this column is invited to contact her via fax at 1-780-473-0970, or e-mail at: vickyv@telus.net



Angel appearing to Samson's mother



Worshipping in the Qu'Appelle Valley

flavor of Sabbath
greeted with a smile and warm handshake
welcomed with a bulletin and usher

yet having a taste of being a stranger
which book to use
which liturgy to follow
how to kneel

how to participate in communion
option to dip your wafer
or drink from the cup?

the binding ties
soul moved
as we sang together
holding hands
"Our Father
who art in heaven..."
acappella

Imagine a Tim Horton's with No Sign

Four clergy in robes,
twelve greying parishioners
in this small steeped church
as we worshipped together
with kneeling benches
prayer books
and a communal wine cup.

No sign posted at the church
for time of service
when we had scoped out
this quaint fishing village
earlier in the week
delighted in the rock formations
lighthouse and reflections in the harbor.

By accident had garnered
information down the road
of morning worship,

watched the tourists walking
on the road past the church,

wanted to say
"Yes they have church.
It starts at 10:30."

Tried to imagine a Tim Horton's
or Walmart with no sign.

Tried to imagine the body of Christ
with no arms of welcome.

Linda Siebenga

Consumer

Taming materialism is part of spiritual renewal – make a clean sweep this Lent

Lisa M. Petsche

"Put God in the centre – and everything will come together." Unknown

Lately I've been drawn to a television home show called Clean Sweep. Over two days, two extremely cluttered rooms in a couple's home are given an organizational makeover by a team of experts that includes an organizing consultant and an interior designer. Episodes begin with views of master bedrooms, home offices, family rooms or "spare" rooms overloaded with paper, collectibles, memorabilia, hobby supplies, sporting equipment, electronics, books, toys, clothing and miscellaneous other stuff, often looking as if a hurricane has hit.

These disaster areas are emptied, then redesigned, while the homeowners sort through the contents (spread out on tarps in their yard), incredulous and sometimes embarrassed at the sheer volume of stuff. Typically they find items they had forgotten about or had misplaced and given up hope of locating. (One woman found a crumpled one-hundred dollar bill that had been buried in her nightstand, another the eyeglasses she'd lost a year ago and eventually replaced.)

With considerable coaching they purge about half of their belongings, which might include childhood collections, clothing dating back to their high school or college days, outdated financial records, items that are damaged, badly worn or simply no longer needed, furnishings and accessories handed down from relatives, duplicate items and never-used purchases or gifts; these are tossed in the garbage, sold at a yard sale or donated to charity. The remainder gets organized into a functional and inviting living space.

Packrat syndrome

How do people end up in such chaos, their material possessions controlling them rather than the other way around?

It's easy to blame clutter on inadequate storage, owing to a design flaw in our home or its furnishings, or insufficient square footage to meet our needs. But the truth is most of us have insidiously gotten caught up in North American consumerism and hyperachievement in our quest for security and meaning. The resulting fast-paced lifestyle leaves us little or no time to organize all the stuff we're accumulating – some of which we don't even get around to using – let alone maintain order or periodically take inventory and purge.

"Clutterbug" or packrat syndrome is more than just a nuisance problem, though.

"Clutter makes it difficult to get things done, enjoy peace and quiet, or spend time the way you really want to. It adds to your stress, slows you down and drains your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual

strength," says professional feng shui consultant Stephanie Roberts, author of the *Clutter-Free Forever! Home Coaching Program*.

I know exactly what she means. Although our home's clutter zones aren't formidable enough to land my husband and me on television any time soon, they nevertheless evoke a sinking feeling whenever we lay eyes on them.



To live more simply

And so I feel a certain kinship with the Clean Sweep couples, and derive vicarious satisfaction from witnessing the dramatic transformations in their homes. Often they are moved to tears when their "new," suddenly spacious rooms are revealed; many report feeling as if a weight has been lifted. I must admit I sometimes come away envious.

We, too, can experience that sense of lightening, though, if we take the opportunity this Lenten season to perform a spiritual "clean sweep." We're fortunate to have a generous time period in which to eliminate or at least tame the habits, thoughts and desires that keep us focused on ourselves and superficial matters rather than on building God's kingdom.

Given that physical clutter breeds mental and spiritual clutter (it's all connected), sorting through our many possessions and paring them down can be an important part of this spiritual cleansing. In fact, Roberts urges us to think of material de-cluttering as "one of the most effective self-improvement tactics available."

Since Lent is a period of conversion, it's the perfect time to begin challenging ourselves to live more simply, reducing our reliance on material things to make us feel valued and content.

The de-cluttering process will leave us feeling "both energized and serene," Roberts assures. In purging excess possessions we let go of the past and relinquish our preoccupation with the future, creating space for "living freely in the present, where peace resides."

Where there is peace, God is – front and centre in our lives instead of on the periphery, nudged out by the false gods so prevalent in today's culture.

He is the only true and lasting source of security and fulfillment.

Lisa M. Petsche is a clinical social worker and widely published journalist residing in Stoney Creek, ON.

Voting in the Global Village

On Location

Theresa Miedema

It is voting day in the Global Village. I am going shopping. I need a new pair of running shoes, kibble for my cats, as well as cat treats, gas for my car and groceries. I hope VISA is ready for some action today.

You may recall that in my last column, I argued that consumers exercise voting rights in the Global Village. Each time we make a purchase, we endorse the company from which we have made our purchase, along with its values, policies and practices. Think of each shopping trip as a referendum on the values, policies and practices of the companies offering you goods and services.

Take this seriously: Big Business does not exercise power all over the globe without the backing of the millions of consumers who provide the capital underpinning this power.

Consumer power. This is the power that consumers have to shape the values and practices of Big Business. We exercise consumer power by communicating with Big Business about their values and practices. Purchases are one form of communication. Customer surveys are another. Letters sent to corporations, congratulating them for decent practices and chastising them for poor policies are another means of exercising this power. Investments and divestments in the share capital of Big Business is yet another form of communicating our views and exercising our consumer power.

But does a \$9.59 bag of cat chow really matter? What about the \$30 tank of gas? Even the \$129.00 running shoes is suspect, to say nothing of the \$1.49 bag of cat treats. Do our purchases really make a difference?

Do our political votes matter?

Have you ever wondered whether you should even bother voting since your one vote will not likely change the result in a local or national election, where millions of votes are cast? Leaving aside the issue of the appallingly low voter participation rates in recent elections, I imagine that if someone told voters that they could not exercise their political right to vote because their single vote will not change electoral results, voters would be outraged. No one can arbitrarily restrict voters' rights in that way in a democracy.

In the Global Village, Big Business exerts significant influence in society. Some people say that this is undemocratic since we don't vote for Big Business. But this is a false assumption. We do vote for Big Business. We vote every time we make a purchase. Even small purchases count towards the final tally.

If you would not allow someone to restrict your political voting rights on the grounds that your vote will not have a material impact, you must apply this same rule to yourself. You must not absolve yourself from the responsibility of considering what

companies you support with your purchases solely on the grounds that your purchases are so small that they are likely not to matter.

Voting as a consumer

But will your purchases matter, in practical reality? That depends. Our influence runs as far as we want it to. The old adage, "the squeaky wheel gets the grease" is as applicable in politics as it is in business. Your influence will be an extension of your willingness to get involved and to engage Big Business and other consumers about business practices, policies and values.

In political democracy, our rights do not end at the ballot box. The same is true of commercial democracy: our voting rights do not end at the check-out. We have the right and the ability to communicate with others, including Big Business itself, about what Big Business is doing at home and abroad.

Becoming an educated voter in the political and commercial democracies of the Global Village takes time. It involves becoming aware of business practices and values, and reflecting on the impact of such practices and values. It involves corresponding with Big Business about what it is doing. It involves working with others to increase awareness and to coordinate responses to Big Business. It may involve personal inconvenience, such as boycotting certain stores or products. It may involve personal cost since cheaper products often involve short-cuts that exploit laborers and are not wholly ethical or good for the community. You see, the rights we enjoy in democracy involve responsibility. You cannot enjoy rights without also taking up responsibilities.

Big Business will respond. It might take time; the results may not be exactly what you had hoped. But Big Business will respond to consumer activism and the exercises of consumer power. It must respond. It literally cannot afford to ignore consumer power.

We cannot ignore the power that Big Business exercises in the Global Village. However, decrying globalization because of the power that Big Business now exercises is an abdication of our own responsibility to be aware, smart consumers.

We all continue to have a role in shaping the society in which we live. This is our neighborhood. We all have a role in keeping our streets clean and safe for everyone, near and far. And sometimes being a good neighbor to others costs us. If you want to play a part in shaping the neighborhood, you have to do your part. Don't complain about the influence of Big Business unless you are ready to put your money where your mouth is – literally.

"On Location" is a column written by Theresa Miedema about current events, ideas and trends.

Short Story

Crazy Squirrel

Ron de Boer

Basically, I'm useless in the kitchen. Other than loosening the odd jar lid or tightening the screw on a dangling pot handle, I pretty much have toes for fingers and little sense for boiling, frying, thawing, marinating or grating food. But every once in a while, a problem presents itself in that same kitchen and, as man of the household, I am called upon to rise to super hero status in the eyes of my wife and daughters.

So it was the day Crazy Squirrel decided to tear all the lining out of our barbecue cover to build his winter nest. Gazing out the window absently while tightening a pot handle, I spotted an off-white tail disappearing under the barbecue. I watched with astonishment as Crazy Squirrel emerged with a beard of white fuzz. When I pounded my fist on the window, Crazy Squirrel looked at me then disappeared back under the barbecue cover to harvest more lining.

Miffed that a mere squirrel was not intimidated by a human's angry face, I slid open the patio door, grabbed the broom leaning against the wall and – like a kid at the carnival hunched over the gopher game with a mallet – began beating every lump that rose from the barbecue cover. If I didn't make contact, at least I'd traumatize the hairy little rodent enough so he'd never return.

He shot out from under the barbecue, skittered along our deck top then leaped to the cherry tree branch bowing toward the house. He then became a tanned brown line flowing along the network of branches of the cherry tree, ascending to the top before leaping to the pine trees at the back of our yard.

He'd gone from our barbecue to the top of the pine trees in about seven seconds, and I was left standing in the snow in my socks, broom raised over my head, air snorting through my nostrils, a wild look in my eyes. When I turned toward the kitchen window, Karen and the girls were staring with their mouths open.

"Are the girls and I safe?" Karen said after I had transformed into my human self and squeaked across the kitchen holding my wet socks in front of me.

"I'm going to get that villain this year," I bellowed in my best super hero voice. "I am not going to let him destroy this city."

"Oooo-kay," one of the teen queens said, rolling her eyes. "Just don't wear your superhero tights when my friends are over."



My history with the famous Crazy Squirrel goes back to last year.

I've often said our backyard is like the Garden of Eden. On one side is a sprawling cherry tree that blossoms white each spring and provides a summertime canopy for iced tea with friends after church; on the other side is a tall linden tree that reaches into our eaves troughs and brushes our bedroom window on breezy summer nights. Along the back of the yard is a row of five towering pine trees that sway in the wind and provide haven to various forms of wildlife including raccoons, opossums, skunks, and neighborhood cats. We sit on the deck each morning of the summer, drinking coffee and watching blue jays, cardinals, and finches



gliding in and out of the yard, singing their songs.

Crazy Squirrel showed up one summer day with a mouthful of peanuts he decided to hide in the flower pots of impatiens on our deck. He scratched out a pile of dirt which included bits of roots and fragments of pink petals then scampered down the stairs and disappeared under the mossy wooden fence separating our yard from Irma's, our elderly neighbor.

Coffee cup in hand, I walked out onto the deck and watched Crazy journey to within five feet of Irma who was standing with a sack of peanuts. Crazy filled his cheeks then re-emerged under the fence. He then proceeded to bury his nuts in various locations in our lawn.

The story of Crazy Squirrel is legendary on our street. My other neighbor, John, says generations of the uniquely hued Crazy Squirrels have wreaked havoc for years, and it is Irma who has provided arms to these furry little terrorists who tear up our lawns and attack our barbecue covers. All year round she tries to attract as many squirrels to her back yard as she can. They keep her company, she says. She trains them to eat right out of her hand in the summer.

Irma's arch enemies are Hans and Linda, who live across the street and who despise squirrels. Long before his retirement, Hans had built several squirrel traps. He figures he's caught about two hundred since the early 70s. He sets up a trap, catches a squirrel then puts the trap in the trunk of his old Datsun and drives it out to the country. Ridding our street of squirrels – "rats with furry tails," he calls them – is Hans' calling. Sort of like driving the devil out of the Garden of Eden, he says.

Generations of Crazy Squirrel's family have eluded Hans' traps, and now the most brazen of the Crazy Squirrel descendants is uprooting my grass and stealing my barbecue cover.

I started out simply trying to traumatize him. I pounded on the kitchen window and threw toys at him when he twirled into the yard. I even sat as still as a statue in my lawn chair one day before charging at him when he got close enough. That was on a Monday.

Wednesday morning I poured a coffee, walked toward the patio door then stopped in my tracks. Crazy Squirrel was not only on the deck, but he was sitting on his haunches with his two front paws on the patio door.

He was mocking me. I charged him again, spilling coffee on the floor.

"You have to mark your territory," said Karen. "Do it at night -- right before bed."

"You've got to be kidding," I said. "Cats do it," she said. "Show that squirrel who is lord of the jungle."

So after dark that night, I waited for a cloud to move in front of the moon then marked my territory -- first the flower pots then the base of the linden and cherry trees and finally the fence line between our yard and Irma's. In the glow of the kitchen window Karen was giving me the thumbs up sign.

The next morning, Crazy Squirrel's bushy off-white tail swayed in the wind from inside our flower pot. When I banged on the window, he turned to look at me then continued his business. Mocking me.

"Rain must have washed your scent off," said Karen. "Do it again tonight."

So that night I drank three bottles of water and marked my territory again.

It wasn't until I was in bed reading a book that I realized a mosquito had marked its territory as well. "If I get West Nile, don't you dare tell anyone where that mosquito bit me," I said to Karen. She rolled over and turned out the light.

Several days later, Crazy Squirrel showed his displeasure with me. We were summoned to the backyard by a series of loud clangs. Even Irma took a break from feeding the chipmunks and stood up to see what all the racket was about.

There at the top of a pine tree, Crazy Squirrel was launching a pine cone missile attack on our back yard, taking particular aim at our steel tool shed which sits directly beneath the pines. He was working frantically to nibble off the stem holding the pine cones to the branches and allowing the pine cones to soar to the ground below. When he had finished Operation Pine Cone Drop, we gathered 320 cones.

"You must have done something to peeve 'im off," Irma said, tossing peanuts to the squirrels worshipping at her feet.



Short Story

"That's no ordinary squirrel," I said to Karen later that night. "It's like he's got a mind of his own. He looks at you like he knows what you're thinking."

"I think you've watched Jurassic Park one too many times," Karen said.

The last straw with Crazy Squirrel occurred the day after he'd completed shredding our barbecue cover. The five year old had left her mittens and scarf in the yard overnight. In the morning only her mitts lay frozen in the snow. After walking around the yard looking for her scarf, the five year old suddenly nudged my leg and pointed upward. There, on the highest branch of the cherry tree hung her rainbow pastel-colored scarf.

That little bugger was dragging everything he could get his sharp little claws on up to his nest. He'd probably built a squirrel-sized sofa and bed up there, too. Oh, for my childhood pellet gun!

Later that day I paid a visit to Hans and Linda's house to talk squirrel. Hans and Linda are in their early 80s but look and act like they're in their 60s. They cross-country ski, bike Kitchener's trails and scurry around the yard all spring and summer tossing dirt and pulling weeds.

Hans came to the door, and I cut right straight to the chase. "You still got those squirrel traps?" I asked.

Hans smiled and began rubbing his palms together. "You got a problem with squirrels, eh?"

Fifteen minutes later I was crossing the street with a wood and chicken-wire contraption Hans had dug out of the storage space in his garage. He said squirrels hadn't dared trespass on his property in years. The trap was a wooden box with a little sliding door on the front. The door could be locked open by a thin piece of string Hans had rigged to the floor of the trap. When the squirrel came in for the peanut, he tripped up the string and shut the door, locking himself in. There was a handle on top to carry the buck-toothed rodents to the van for a little trip to the edge of town.

"Sort of like you're in the mafia," Hans said, wheezing with laughter.

I wasn't expecting to catch a single squirrel when I set the trap up on the deck. I hadn't caught a fish in my life, and the only thing I'd ever caught in a mouse trap was a hard piece of cheese. So when I caught one of the black squirrels on the first morning I was ecstatic.

"Don't even think about bringing it in the house," Karen said.

"The kids will get to see a squirrel close up," I said.

"Get rid of the body, Capone," Karen said.

So I did. I drove it to a wooded area about a half kilometer from our house and opened the door. Blackie scampered away happily.

Six squirrels later I still hadn't caught Crazy Squirrel. But the squirrel population had noticeably diminished and our backyard was returning to its utopian state.

"I can't understand what's happened to all my squirrelries," Irma said one day.

where he swung for three or four seconds then disappeared to the peaks of the pine trees.

"He's like a monster who wanders the streets while everyone's asleep and then disappears at dawn to the haunted mansion on the hill," I said.

"Maybe you should make up playing cards, put a bounty on his head," Karen said. "It worked for the



United States. You've removed all the other terrorists. The ace of spades is always the hardest to get."

But then we found out something that put Operation Freedom Backyard on hold for good. The fifteen year-old, who loves all things furry and beady-eyed, had found out my diabolical plan and had been getting up every morning to check the trap. She'd let Crazy out twice already.

"You're harboring terrorists," I said. "You're supposed to be a part of the Coalition of the Willing," I said. "You're an accomplice, a partner in crime. You could go to jail for that."

She squinted at me. "How would you like it if God started trapping humans and dropping us in Europe and Asia? One day you're walking to school, the next thing you know you're being dropped in the Brazilian rainforest. Our backyard is their home; they love it here."

"God doesn't work that way," I said sheepishly.

"You're playing God to those squirrels. Irma feeds them just like we're supposed to feed the homeless in the winter. They're just minding their own business living the lives of squirrels and you're like the neighborhood Nazi or the Ku Klux Klan or something. You're like George Bush."

"That's a little harsh," I said. "Have you seen the barbecue cover?"

"Who cares about the barbecue cover? He needs a warm bed for the winter." There were tears in her eyes, and by now her three sisters and mother were standing behind her with their hands on their hips, too. "You have no right invading the back yard and imprisoning all those squirrels just because one squirrel needs a warm bed."

"What about the weapons of mass destruction?" I said. "We caught him red-handed launching pine cones at the shed."

"He was mad at you for bullying him, threatening him, yelling at him," chimed in the twelve year old. "Just because they speak a different language doesn't mean they don't understand you."

I looked out the window just then and could swear I saw Crazy Squirrel staring at us from the cherry tree, watching this United Nations meeting unfold in the kitchen. I blinked and he was gone. I scanned the yard from fence to fence. He was out there somewhere; I could feel it. If I let up, he'd return again and bring back his army of bushy-tails with him.

"What are you going to do, start invading everyone's backyard on the street?" Karen said. "You see a squirrel and you're just going to assume it's up to no good? What about chipmunks? They're from the squirrel family. Are they part of your axis of evil, too?"

"Okay, okay, okay. I give up," I said. "I'll return the trap; I'll put up a poster telling all squirrels they can return to their rightful homeland."

"It's the right thing to do," Karen said later that night. "What got into you?"

"It just felt good to get rid of them," I said. "I can't explain it. When you hate them enough, it feels good to get rid of them."



The squirrels are back. They scamper along the deck, leap from tree to tree, chase each other across the grass. They do somersaults and give each other high fives as they carry away barbecue-cover loot.

"Isn't it wonderful?" Irma said. "My little squirrelries have come back."

"Like little prodigal sons," I offer through my teeth.

"If you're nice to them they're nice back," she said, squinting at me. "Look how they never dig up my lawn."

My being nice to them hasn't helped. They continue burying Irma's nuts all over our yard and in our flower pots. I no longer mark my territory, either. Squirrels come and go as they please. Pretty soon we can take down our fences.

"The president should be more like you," Karen says. "Instead of spending money on traps, just let them have the barbecue cover. It would be cheaper to give them stuff than to spend all that money punishing them for taking stuff."

Somewhere on the top of a pine tree, Crazy Squirrel is snoozing in his warm little cave with a tiny squirrel smile on his face. Nestled on the other half of the nest is Crazy's mate and between them are four or five more little crazies waiting for spring. Their parents have told them of their liberated new land. No laws, no boundaries. It's like paradise, they say in squirrel language.

And they tell them not to worry about Crazy Human standing behind the window with a coffee cup in his hand.



"Sure is strange," I said. Hans' wheezy laugh echoed in my head. "Maybe squirrels migrate south now."

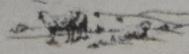
"Don't be ridiculous," Irma said.

But the Crazy Squirrel eluded my trap as his forefathers had dodged Hans' traps. Each morning I would come into the kitchen with my coffee and he'd be sitting on the top of the deck, waiting for me. Mocking me. Then he'd take an Olympic dive to the bowing branch

Looking at life

COUNTRY COUNTERCULTURE

VERN M. GLEDDIE



Goodbye to Earthkeeping

Earthkeeping, an organization in Alberta for Christian agriculture, was formally closed down in February. About 20 members gathered to remember, regret and rejoice.

If that sounds like a three point sermon for the occasion, well a preacher was invited to lead us through a closing. Bob Jacobsen, a retired pastor and long-time member of Earthkeeping, with deep feeling and insight brought us to the end.

The motion and discussion to end Earthkeeping was short, almost an afterthought. It had become obvious we could no longer sustain a viable farm organization after 30 years of work and struggle. The members present were still lively, still sharing a viable perspective. But almost all were charter members and retired or near retired.

Like a horse

Pastor Bob, also a farmer, led us through a retrospective on our involvement including sins, mistakes and accomplishments. He read from his new book, *All Nature Sings*, a chapter about a cherished horse about the same age as Earthkeeping and near death too. Bob read about the useful and fruitful life the horse had led and the tender feelings he had for her. By the end of the reading pastor Bob had to stop to compose himself.

Sins and mistakes

The introduction was followed by a personal consideration of sins that might have contributed to the demise of our communal effort. Were there priorities out of order? Had success been presumed without effort? Did I expect from others what I should have done? Did I fail to live out the principles of Earthkeeping? We were asked to silently confess our sins, repent and ask for cleansing.

Next our attention was turned to mistakes in judgment. These were due to the frailty of human nature – “not quite sin,” said Pastor Bob. Perhaps I had been a poor listener to the Word or to others. Did I push my own agenda? Did I fail to pray over everything? Did I try to cover up wrong? Did I imply that others or circumstances were to blame for my poor judgment? We were asked to silently consider mistakes made.

The timing

Then the rhetorical question was asked: has Earthkeeping served its purpose, lived out its calling? Was it more suited to another time? Others may yet pick up the vision. Perhaps we worked ourselves out of a job. We were reminded that the

bronze serpent God commanded Moses to build, 700 years later He told Hezekiah to destroy. So was it right to start Earthkeeping? Do we criticize Hezekiah out of love for Moses when they were both obedient?

Good memories

After being reminded of being at one and the same time forgiven sinners, unprofitable servants and saints in the making, the meeting was opened for sharing of good experiences from the last 30 years. The enjoyment of regular well-attended local topical meetings, the introduction of the concept of stewardship to Alberta agriculture, surprising turnaround in major government policy due to faithful witness, changes prompted in our own farming practices, agricultural land realized as a gift and not a commodity were a few of the cherished memories.

There were a few tears, considerable laughter and good-natured ribbing. We still enjoy coming together. We are still of one mind. We promised each other to gather for an annual potluck.

Passing the torch

There was one non-member in attendance: the pastor of the church my wife and I attend in a nearby town. I introduced him as a Saskatchewan farm boy and a pastor on sabbatical studying church leadership. I had invited Mel to come with me for a unique opportunity to observe leadership. He decided to come because he had never seen a formal closing out of a church or parachurch organization. Regrettably the usual is either a blow-up or a fizz.

Pastor Bob asked Pastor Mel to close out the meeting. The two were from different generations. They had never before met. The concept of Christian communal occupational service was a comfortable fit for Bob, but new to Mel. Mel’s prayer, though, was like he had caught a lighted torch.

Would that a group of young farmers would be so enthusiastic! Who knows what may come from what Pastor Mel heard that day. The torch, however, will have to be passed on to farmers. The land waits for keepers of the earth to together offer a sacrifice of righteousness.

Vern Gleddie still lives and works on the farm his son has taken over located near Edmonton, AB



Sunday morning rebels

Dirk Schouten

During my third year at Dordt College, I taught Sunday school to fifth-grade students at one of the Christian Reformed churches in town. In hindsight, I remember the experience more for what didn’t happen than what did.

I team-taught with Theresa Veenstra, an ambitious elementary education major who was looking for classroom experience. We alternated Sunday mornings; Theresa taught one Sunday and I handled the next.

The evening before my first meeting with the students, Theresa stopped by my dorm room to drop off teaching materials. She handed me the instructor’s manual and a half dozen worksheets that told and illustrated the story of Jonah. She had taught the past Sunday and was happy with the group. They were good kids, she said.

During the church service the next morning, I waited for the minister to dismiss Sunday school participants just before he began his sermon. This was how things were done at my own CRC back in Ontario. But he didn’t. Instead, I sat through the entire service before finding out that Sunday school started after church.

While having coffee in the fellowship hall, I was in for another surprise; the students, I was told, had to practice singing for a half-hour before Sunday school began. Incredulous, I walked to the sanctuary and peered in. It was true. There they were, singing at the front of the sanctuary under the direction of one of the teachers.

It was 11:15 a.m. by the time I sat down with my students. I told the students about myself and asked them to introduce themselves. Mike, a handsome, confident 10-year-old, was clearly the group leader. I knew his behaviour would help determine the classroom atmosphere. Mike sat between Darren, who said nothing, and Jeremy, who wouldn’t stop talking. On the other side of the table sat Katie, Melissa and Jenna. They sat close together and consulted each other in whispers before answering any of my questions.

If any of them ratted, I’d be fired and they’d get Theresa Veenstra each Sunday for the rest of the year.

We met in a room that contained a P.A. system that the program director rang at 11:50 to signal the end of classes. Mrs. De Haan was an older, conservative woman with impeccable hair. She had called me a week earlier to tell me of her need to interrupt my class to ring the buzzer.

I started the lesson on Jonah, but the students weren’t interested in what I had to say. I tried to be dynamic, dramatic, excited, but any interest I showed in the story of a wayward prophet was wasted. At 11:50, we heard a knock at the door and Mrs. De Haan

came into the room quietly, her dress immaculate, her hair perfect. She walked around our table without making eye contact with anyone and headed towards the intercom, where she pushed a white button on the wall, causing a loud bell-like noise to sound through the basement. The kids grabbed their materials and scrambled out of the room, to freedom.

Two weeks later, Theresa came to my dorm room with the instructor’s manual and worksheets. I told her I was concerned about Sunday school. She was confused.

“Think about it,” I said. “These kids are in church from nine in the morning until noon. Three hours. That’s way too long.”

The next day, I started a lesson on Abraham’s preparation to sacrifice Isaac. Despite its violence, the students weren’t interested in the story. I thought some trivia could liven things, so I told them that the philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, had lost his mind trying to figure out the meaning of the story. Not a bite. It was late in the morning and they had had enough of church.

I looked at each one of them, then put the teacher’s manual down.

“Close your Bibles,” I said.

They looked up.

“Go ahead, close your Bibles,” I said. “Put away your handouts, too. Get rid of your pens. Put your erasers away. The lesson is over.”

They cleaned the table off, excited that something unconventional was taking place. When the table was cleared, I told them what I believed – that it was not right to put 10-year-olds through a three-hour church education marathon every Sunday morning.

They hesitated, sure I was testing them. Then, one by one, they began to agree with me. Yeah, it’s too much, they said, but there was nothing they could do. Besides, they couldn’t leave the property because they depended on rides home from their parents. What could we do instead of the lesson?

“We could hang out,” I said. “We can sit around the table and eat snacks, play games. We can talk about our lives, our families, what’s going on in the world. We can play poker, teach each other card tricks.”

Of course, we would need to take care of two items, I added. The first was secrecy. If any of them ratted, I’d be fired and they’d get Theresa Veenstra each Sunday for the rest of the year.

They shook their heads vigorously. No one would rat, they promised.

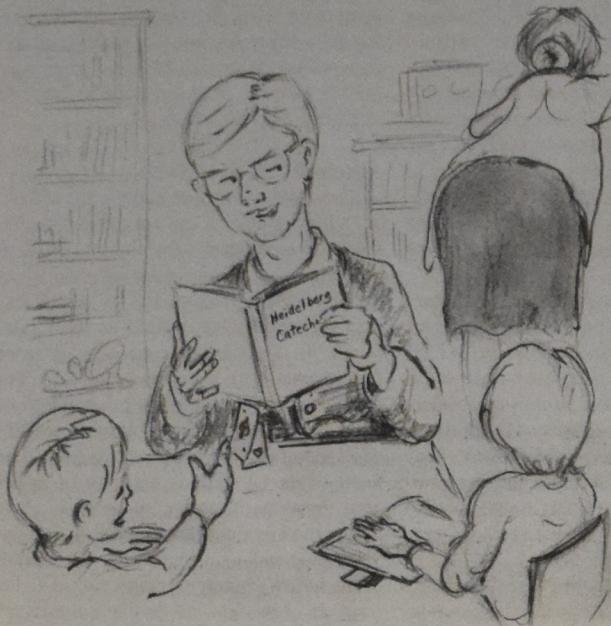
“The other issue is Mrs. De Haan,” I said. “She comes in at 11:50 to sound the buzzer.”

The students moaned and bowed their heads in dejection, but I told them not to worry. Mrs. De Haan could be tricked with a bit of good acting.

For the next few minutes, I explained how Sunday school would unfold from then on. We’d begin at 11:00 and whip through the discussion questions. I’d answer the

Continued on page 15...

Looking at life



questions myself and teach key terms. That would take all of five minutes. For the rest of the period, we'd relax. At 11:45, we'd pull out our Sunday school material and prepare for Mrs. De Haan's arrival.

"So what I need now is a volunteer," I said. "Mike, are you a decent actor?"

"I think so," Mike said nervously.

"Good," I answered. "Here's how we'll do it. When Mrs. De Haan comes in, we'll all have our Bibles open. She'll walk around the table to sound the buzzer. While she's doing this, I'm going to say, 'So, Mike. Here's the final question. What does the story of Abraham and Isaac teach us about our own relationships with God?'"

The room was dead quiet. No one breathed.

"Well," he said. "I think... I think it teaches us that God wants us to trust him no matter what."

"Exactly, Mike," I said. "That is a very good answer."

Mrs. De Haan rang the buzzer, turned and walked out of the room, smiling at me as she exited. She closed the door behind her.

Squeals and laughter punctured the air. Darren and Nathan turned to high-five Mike, their new hero. In their excitement, Jenna, Melissa and Katie grabbed and hugged each other. I slid my hands in my pockets and smiled. We had just pulled off the biggest con in Sunday School history.

They stared at me in disbelief. "You're nuts," Nathan said.

"Shut up, Nate," Mike said, suddenly willing to play along.

"This is gonna be awesome."

We played poker until 11:45, then cleaned up the cards and

living in Canada was like. They asked about college. They wanted to know if I had a girlfriend or if I drank.

They told me about themselves. Darren's father was going to the hospital to find out if a tumor in his stomach was malignant cancer. Melissa's family was moving to Omaha even though she and her siblings didn't want to. How was class with Theresa? I asked. Boring, they said.

We took turns bringing snacks. We ate Rice Krispie squares, chocolate haystacks, jelly beans. Once, I brought a half-dozen Oh Henry! bars and we held a contest to see who could clean the most chocolate and nuts off the nugget centre.

We played cards, hangman, checkers, Trivial Pursuit. We discovered who could hold his breath the longest. We arm-wrestled.

At 11:45 a.m., we pulled out our Bibles and worksheets and rehearsed. At 11:50, Mrs. De Haan would knock on the door and enter. As she walked around the table, a theological question—with its scripted answer—would be tossed into the air: "Melissa, what does this story tell us about Jesus?"

"Well...um...that he loves everyone and wants to have a relationship with each of us."

"Darren, what are the two great commandments?"

"I think that we have to love God and that we have to love each other as ourselves."

"Jenna, now that we've looked at this story closely, what would you say is its message?"

"Um...I think that God forgives even though we sin against him."

One morning, we played a game of "Dare" in which a person had to leave the room and come back with something from the church he or she wasn't supposed to take. Nathan came back with the minister's notes from the morning's sermon.

"Where did you get these?" I demanded.

"From the pulpit," he said, terrified.

"You went into the sanctuary and robbed the pulpit? Have you ever heard of excommunication?"

"Dirk, I'm sorry. I didn't..."

"He's just kidding, Nathan," Mike said with a laugh.

One evening, towards the end
See Sunday rebels page 16...

After the Buzzer

Tim Antonides



Sour grapes

Don Cherry don't always use the right words. And he ain't particularly bright. But that's never stopped him from speaking his mind on Hockey Night in Canada every Saturday night. Like many Canadians, I grew up listening to Cherry's ranting at the first intermission. I looked forward to it (and still do). Because Don knows hockey.

It seems that Don knows a lot about everything. During the heated period leading up to the American invasion of Iraq, he figured he knew quite a bit about the best course of action. It was obvious. Some of us just didn't realize it. He's been lecturing us for years on a variety of subjects—from the Bloc Québécois to the Canadian educational system to the oppression of the people by the "left wing media."

All things considered, I find Don Cherry both invigorating and annoying. I hated his ridiculous protests against Hockey Canada for its commercials about abusive hockey parents. His tirade against visors and the Frenchmen who wear them was more stupid than offensive. After all, more than 55 percent of Quebecers don't even know who he is and the other 45 percent who do don't care what he says. It seems he's cursed with a condition that plagues a number of prominent figures these days—taking complex problems, creating good vs. evil polarities, and using brash rhetoric to place all the blame on the evildoers.

In the case of the Hockey Canada commercials, Cherry decided it was the "left-wing" guys in Vancouver who created the ads and were responsible for sullying the reputation of all our wonderful, respectful hockey parents.

Don Cherry and Archie Bunker

You have to love Don too. He's a self-declared Ontariophile who loves Muskoka and the 401. And his xenophobia is endearing. He's a good ol' boy. He loves hockey and the Canadian guys who play it.

I enjoy watching Don Cherry the same way I enjoy watching reruns of "All in the Family." Archie Bunker may be simple and he may be insulting, but he's great entertainment. Back then, he showed us the bigot in many of us.

Don Cherry illustrates our human tendency to reduce things into factions. In world affairs, he won't allow for pacifists and patriots to lie in the same bed. In his hockey world, there are good Canadian kids and Euroweenies. A three-minute segment on "Coach's Corner" and the scales fall from our eyes. The world suddenly becomes clear. The battle lines are drawn and there's no missing the good guys and bad guys. And Don dresses better than Archie Bunker, donchathink?

It's hard work to wrestle with life's contradictions. As Reformed believers, we've got one foot firmly implanted in the world while the other one tries to anchor us from being swept away. We look for ways to transform that world for Christ but see all areas of life through tainted and blurry eyes, fumbling for the spectacles of our faith. Don takes the work out of such struggles. Right is right and wrong is wrong. If you don't know the difference, you're not yelling loud enough.

Cherry understands the game of hockey and brings out much of its beauty and magnificence. Saturday night wouldn't be the same without him. A lot of people (including the "left-wingers in Vancouver") would do well to realize one important fact: Don Cherry is an entertainer, not a politician or a philosopher. It's his job to entertain, provoke, and amuse us. Enjoy it for the horse-and-pony show that it is. You can't censor him. You can't change his mind. But above all, you can't take him seriously.

Tim Antonides has returned to BC after a year of graduate work to teach and coach at Surrey Christian School



Looking at life

A meeting with A. A.

Cobi and I went to an open meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous recently. We were the guests of one of our sons. He wouldn't object to my using his name but he does belong to an anonymous organization so I'll leave it that way. It was basically a regular meeting in a banquet format with a speaker, intended to give us relevant insight into the working of A. A.

As we entered the hall we were each given a name-tag — just "Ty" and "Cobi," — with the members of the group receiving an identifying lapel flower. There were men with flowers with wives without; women with flowers and husbands without; some couples both had flowers; some were single. Some women were elegantly dressed; some were nigh impossibly dressed.

I mused that if that one lady would bend over there might be an embarrassing "fall out." My son assured me that would be no problem — one or more of his "alcky" brothers would be happy to help her put them back in. A few men came in tee-shirts and jeans but most came dressed for the occasion.

It was a celebration. After a visit to the bar for juices or sodas and meeting "Bob," "Jim," and "Nancy" and some small-talk in the midst of a stream of traffic, we all found our places at round tables of eight.

First-name basis

What amazed us was the size of the crowd. There were at least 1,000 people in this "humongous" banquet place with over 100 tables. As we sat there, a steady stream of people came by, many stopping to shake hands with our son who introduced them to us — all on the first-name basis, which is the mark of A. A. I was struck by the open friendliness of every person we met and I puzzled whether this was because of a personality trait of alcoholics or whether it was the old Chicago hale, hearty, and breezy way of

relating to any and all who come along. Maybe a bit of both. We had no problem in feeling welcome.

The master of ceremonies rang the bell and brought the meeting to order.

"My name is Larry and I'm an alcoholic," he announced.

"Hi! Larry," the members responded in total and resounding unison.

"Let's pray."

"Lord give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change."

"Give me the strength to change the things I can."

"And give me the wisdom to know the difference." (All in unison)

Then a dozen men lined up to set forth the twelve steps of the A. A. program for recovery and sobriety, and the meeting was off to its program for the evening.

Honest admission

The A. A. group we were visiting, with over 500 members, is the largest "closed meeting" of over 260,000 groups in over 150 countries world-wide. It was celebrating its 25th anniversary. There were members present who helped to form the group and were blessed with over 25 years of sobriety.

Each one of the founders present was introduced. And those with 20 years, and 15 years, etc., were recognized. And there were those with only a year and some just entering the program. What an interesting fellowship of people all dedicated to regaining wholeness in the struggle with addiction!

One lady, a former parishioner of mine, came to our table and said, "You saved our marriage 17 years ago when you got Bob to go to A. A." I could only praise the Lord for his mercy.

A. A. was formally organized in 1939 with the publication of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. It was spawned by Dr. Sam Shoe-

maker and the Oxford Group, an association focused on moral rearmament based on biblical truths. It began when Bill W. and Dr. Bob pledged to help each other overcome their alcoholism in 1935, leading to its organization in 1939. By 1972 it had one million members. Today it has over two million worldwide and growing apace.

The program does not tout its success or lament its failures. The leaders acknowledge that every meeting has new members and "missing" members who do not return. For some people the program is a kind of a revolving door. Those who are not dedicated seekers of sobriety do not attain it. Those who really seek do find it.

The essence of the program is an honest admission: that "I am powerless to overcome my addiction without the help of God" as each one knows him; that the way to deliverance is by a faithful pursuit of sobriety through following the twelve-step program with the help of others who are also seeking to gain and maintain sobriety; that each person having come to sobriety is dedicated to assisting others to attain the same deliverance.

Two alcoholics helping one another

When a new member joins the group he is assigned a sponsor who becomes the key person in his struggle to faithfully carry out the program. A sponsor is expected to direct, to encourage and in some ways to discipline the person assigned to him. To so respect one's sponsor is a condition of membership.

The way to healing is not a matter of applied psychology but by way of a spiritual discussion between two alcoholics helping each other, the one just farther along in the process of gaining and maintaining sobriety than the newcomer. The relative success of the A. A. program is due to the fact that an alcoholic who no longer drinks has

an exceptional faculty for "reaching" and helping an uncontrolled drinker.

A fundamental truth always assumed is that no one wants to be an alcoholic. It is not the goal in anyone's life. All alcoholics want to be sober. But the price of conquering this addiction is one that some just can't muster — giving up the "solution" that alcohol has become in the struggle to face life in their mixed-up world.

A model for the church

In my rather intimate experience with A. A. I have come to the conclusion that it could be a model for the church of Christ when it come to the matter of integrity in dealing with one another. One would expect that the church should be the model for A. A. The church's message is more fundamental than the message of A. A. but to a large degree the church has failed to make the demand of truthfulness in the life of its members that is so basic to A. A. The heart of its 12 steps is the way of openness, honesty, integrity, repentance, confession and reconciliation. How often have you witnessed a sinner making the rounds of his fellow church members asking to be forgiven of the sins he/she has committed? It is much easier to find another church. In A. A. there is a bountiful on hypocrisy. Few churches have attained to the same level.

Thank the Lord for A. A.



Ty Hofman is a Yankee-Canuck and retired minister of the Christian Reformed Church, living in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Sunday rebels

...continued from page 15

of the school year, Theresa came by my room to talk.

"It's our Sunday school group," she said, walking in. "I need your advice about them." We sat down.

"They're a great bunch of kids, but they seem frustrated with me," she said.

"Really?" I said, feigning worry.

"Oh, yeah. It's clear to me they'd rather have you teach them."

"I doubt that," I said.

"No, they say it regularly. And here's another thing. They giggle whenever Mrs. De Haan comes in to sound the buzzer."

"Listen, Dirk," she continued. "I want you to tell me what makes your lessons better than mine."

I stared at her, unsure of how to answer.

"So, what is it you do with them?" she continued.

I paused. She had me cornered. "C'mon. Tell me."

"I don't know," I said. She leaned forward.

"What do you mean you don't know? Dirk..."

"I do nothing, Theresa. That's the honest truth. I do nothing."

"Baloney," she said. "You have to do something a little differently."

I felt my confidence returning. "No, I don't do anything differently. Actually, I don't do anything. Nothing."

She looked at me, unsure how to interpret my comments.

"If you don't believe me, ask the students. Really, there's not too much going on in that class."

She stared hard but didn't answer.

For the rest of the school year, I had

little contact with Theresa. She seemed wary of me, as if there were something she wanted from me even though she didn't know how to get it.

September ushered in my last year at Dordt. I was set to finish my major and take a pile of electives. Mrs. De Haan called me to see if I wanted to teach Sunday school again. I thought a year was enough, so I turned her down. Besides, I had moved on to greater acts of subversion as editor of the college newspaper.

Occasionally, I saw Theresa around campus. Late in the autumn, she showed up on publication night to help us put the newspaper together. She said she wanted to edit copy, but I knew her real intention was to beef up an already impressive résumé. She was good at editing. She could take any

story and make it better.

I was sure Theresa hadn't asked our students why they had preferred me. That would have been too risky for her pride. I also knew she hadn't asked from the way she acted; she showed me too much respect for someone who knew the truth.

Good, I thought. Let her believe the lie. No one was ever worse off for it.

Dirk Schouten has graduate degrees in English and journalism. Currently, he is finishing his Bachelor of Education at the University of Western Ontario. He teaches English part-time at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ont. He prepares each lesson as thoroughly as possible.

"Theresa Veenstra" and "Mrs. De Haan" are pseudonyms.

The Christian life

Becoming lie-demolishers and truth-seekers

Sonya Vanderveen-Feddeema

Imagine this: someone has told a lie about you, or your spouse, or child. Feelings of pain, betrayal, and anger overwhelm you. The cement-like knot in your stomach physically evidences your anxiety. A desire to set the record straight consumes you. Even if you don't know who originally told the lie, as a Christian parent you do know its source because Jesus revealed that Satan "is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44b).

Then imagine this: as God surveys North American society, he sees a prevailing culture based on many lies where "truth has stumbled in the streets" (Isaiah 59:14b). Grief and anger fill his heart because lies destroy the good world he created and lead to casualties for today and eternity. He loved his world so much that he sent his Son, "the way, and the truth and the life" (John 14:6), to make people free. He longs to set the record straight.

God calls Christian parents to do exactly that. Agur's prayer is also ours: "Keep falsehood and lies far from me" (Proverbs 30:8b). Not only are we commanded to instruct our children to speak the truth. We are also entrusted with the task of teaching them to become lie-demolishers and truth-seekers within their cultural context.

When the apostle Paul encountered falsehood in the Corinthian church, he wrote, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (II Cor. 10:5). In his action-packed words, we hear a clarion call to discern destructive cultural lies and to expose them to God's truth, which protects us (Psalm 40:11), guides us (Psalm 43:3), and sets us free (John 8:32).

Working the Book

How can we refute the cultural lies our kids are exposed to? We refute them by knowing God's word and applying it to our lives. In Leif Enger's novel, *Peace Like A River*, 11-year-old Reuben Land describes how his father reads the Bible: "Many a night I woke to the murmur of paper and knew he was up, sitting in the kitchen with frayed King James — oh, but he worked that book; he held to it like a rope ladder" (pp. 103).

When in our personal and family devotions, schools, churches, and work places we "work" the Book and cling to its message for dear life, we become sensitive to God's truth and grow in our ability to discern lies. Our longing for truth, both in individual lives and culturally, increases. Through the Bible's stories, we see how lies destroyed lives. Think of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27), Naboth and King Ahab (1 Kings 21), and King David and Uriah (2 Samuel 11). But we also see examples of how God blessed truth-telling. For example, the woman who touched Jesus' cloak and received healing when she "told him the whole truth" (Mark 5:33b) and the people present at Pentecost who confessed their sins — in other words, spoke the truth to God about their spiritual condition — and received eternal life (Acts 2).

Cultural lies

What are some of the cultural lies our kids are exposed to and how does the Bible refute each one?

First, in *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* Mary Pipher describes the impact on young girls of our culture's ideals and obsessions with how the human body ought to look. Confronted with barbie doll prototypes, girls learn to criticize their bodies for not meeting the ideal.

However, Pipher points out, the ideal is a lie. She says, "What is culturally accepted as beautiful is achieved only

with great artifice — photo crops, camera angles and composite bodies are necessary to get the pictures we now see of beautiful women.... Many girls scorn their true bodies and work for a false body. They allow the culture to define who they should be" (pp. 56, 57).

The Bible clearly rejects the cultural lie that Pipher points out. God, who created our inmost beings and knit us together in our mothers' wombs (Psalm 139:13), was so creative he didn't make two bodies alike. Why then should we stand idly by while our culture expects boys and girls, including our children, to meet an ideal that causes self-loathing, frustration, and damaged self-images? Instead, we may point our children to 1 Corinthians 6:19-20's liberating question, answer, and command: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." We may also echo Paul's urgent plea to the Roman church "to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12:1).

Glory in ordinary things

Second, our children encounter the lie that they have to accomplish grand things in order to be valued. Jesus' teachings on servanthood as the goal of Christians' lives is drowned out by messages like "Succeed at any cost," and "You deserve the best," and "Get ahead; get noticed." How enticing all those messages are! How they appeal to our pride and desire to be self-reliant! And yet they don't lead to abundant life — service, humility, sharing, loving, building community — the kind of existence Jesus wants his children to experience.

In the novel, *Lying Awake*, Mark Salzman describes Sister Priscilla, a nun and teacher, who embodied a lifestyle opposed to this lie: "... her actions were all beautiful. She turned even the most ordinary tasks, like pulling maps down or emptying the pencil sharpener, into sacraments. On the other hand, she could talk about faith in a way that made it sound like common sense. She made divine things seem human, and human things seem divine" (p. 81).

Salzman's description of Sister Priscilla calls to mind the apostle Paul's words, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). In ordinary things and in quiet displays of faithfulness, the character Sister Priscilla brought glory to God. Her life had value because God's love gave it meaning — not because of grand things she tried to accomplish to bring glory to herself. As our children mature, we may assure them that the same applies to their lives because the way God measures success is not the way the world measures it.

Truth-bigots

Third, our children increasingly hear our culture's false claim that all truth is relative — no absolutes remain. In *Mosaic Madness: The Poverty and Potential of Life in Canada*, Reginald W. Bibby writes, "Those who dare to assert that they have the truth are labeled bigots. Truth has been replaced by personal viewpoint" (p. 2). Confronted with the lie that Christianity is just one option among many as the route to God, our children need to protect their hearts by putting on "the full armor of God," including "the belt of truth . . . and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:13, 14a, 17b). From an early age they need to repeatedly hear the stories of God's power and faithfulness to his children. And they also need to hear our stories of faith and witness God at work in our lives so that we show that we "are a letter from Christ . . . written

not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Corinthians 3:3).

Other cultural lies exist besides the three mentioned so far. For example, we are encouraged to believe that it is our right to speak what's on our minds no matter how crass, hurtful or deceptive our words may be. However, Scripture says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Ephesians 4:29). Also, we are led to believe that we are the masters of our own destinies and that, if we set our minds to it, we can become whatever we want to be. But we know that God is our Master and that "many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (Proverbs 19:21). And our culture religiously glorifies youth, to the detriment of the elderly, while the Bible teaches: "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:32).

Lies abound. But Christian parents, equipped with Scripture, need not be afraid because, as Martin Luther so exultantly expresses in his famous hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, based on Psalm 46: "And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God has willed his truth to triumph through us" (Psalter Hymnal #469).

British among the most secular in the world

A poll taken for the BBC program "What The World Thinks Of God" suggests the United Kingdom (Britain) is among the most secular nations in the world. More than a quarter of the British polled thought the world would be more peaceful if nobody believed in God, but very few people in other countries agreed.

The countries polled were the US, UK, Israel, India, South Korea, Indonesia, Nigeria, Russia, Mexico and Lebanon.

"Overall, the results of our poll show that levels of belief and religious activity in the UK are consistently lower than in most of the other countries polled," said the producers. "Only Russia and South Korea produced results similar to the UK. The highest levels of belief are found in the poorer nations of Nigeria, India and Indonesia.

"However, the US also stands out in contrast with the UK. The US is the richest nation polled and yet has a very high level of belief."

Those willing to die for their God or their beliefs, included more than 90% in Indonesia and Nigeria, and 71% in Lebanon and the US, while only 19% of Britons were willing to do so. 29% of them, however, said the world would be more peaceful without beliefs in God. On who is to blame for much of the trouble in the world, 37% of Britons said it was people of other religions. 33% of Israelis agreed.

In most of the countries covered, well over 80% said they believed in God or a higher power. In Nigeria the figure was 100% and in the US 91%, with the UK scoring lowest at 67%.

In Nigeria 91% of people said they regularly attended a religious service, contrasting with 21% in the UK and only 7% of Russians.

[Files from Telegraph and Guardian.]

Opinion



Yes . . . but

Bert Hielema

Who says that politics in Canada is always dull? I agree it was until a couple of weeks ago, with the next election looking like a Martin coronation and the race for the Conservative top job a jaw-breaking yawn.

Fire in the political woodwork

But now, over a mere \$100 million, the country is in uproar. Suddenly there is fire in the political woodwork with Martin getting roasted, the Liberals ablaze, Chretien, clever man, burning his bridges, leaving the new Prime Minister to extinguish the furor in the nation. I think that Mr. Martin is having second thoughts about steering the ship of state, something quite different from his ownership of Canada Steamship Lines.

At any rate, Canadian politics is now almost as exciting as American.

Will Martin go the way of Dean, who also appeared to be a shoo-in to lead the Democrats against Bush? Now, tail between legs, burdened by endorsements from Gore – the man who might have been president – and Carter – who was the US top dog 25 years ago – Dean returned to the green mountain state, burning through \$40 million (US) to end up where he started in insignificant Vermont.

Money rules

Will we now see a John Kerry trotting out from the Canadian nowhere?

Bilingual Belinda perhaps (English and German, but no French), more aptly named Billion-da, backed by the fortune of Papa Stronach, a self-made billionaire who thinks that having made money qualifies one for the highest office of the land.

Stronach whose Austrian name "Strohsack" means "Straw-sack," does justice to his birth-name: Belinda being the straw-woman, he the real power holding the money-bag, which may buy her the Quebec vote, as each riding, no matter how small, carries the same weight in electing the next Conservative leader.

Finally Canadian politics has become more interesting, even though the outcome probably will make no difference. Look what happened in Ontario: we now have a kinder and more accessible Mike Harris with a Dalton McGuinty mask. Money rules, no matter who is in power. If politicians were doctors they would today be mired in malpractice suits.

Well, perhaps that's an overstatement. Suppose – and you never know – federally Jack Layton, the socialist, may become the king maker in a minority Liberal government.

What is sure is that whoever wins the next election whether in the USA or Canada, will have to cope with such daunting problems, that I for one can't see why a sane person would want the job.

Kerry vs Bush

We know that in politics nothing is certain. At least in Canada we still have polite politicians. In the US of A, when the going gets tough the politics get rough. Already the Bush-Cheney hitmen have sent out 6 million unsolicited e-mails titled "Unprincipled," detailing the Kerry count of special interests. Already the rumor mill is being infiltrated with tales of extra-marital sex, hoping that Kerry may go from hero to zero.

Bush, at this point sounds desperate. Poll ratings in the upper 40s are as low as they've ever been. The jobless figures stubbornly refuse to get better and the awful carnage of Iraq grows worse. You can smell the panic in the White House. Did intelligence get it wrong on WMD? Do what you vowed not to do: set up an inquiry. Does anybody care about Bush's missing year in the National Guard? Do what you vowed not to do: release a mound of paperwork. Halliburton suddenly begins its own TV ad campaign, 30-second slots proclaiming: "We are serving our troops because of what we know, not who we know," hoping that repetition will become the foundation of truth.

Then there is the lesson of Dean biting back at the Bush brigade: defeated in spite of spending Forty Million Dollars (\$40,000,000). Cash was no help to him when the tide turned. Why should Bush's cash – the mountains of it already banked and nearing \$200 million – be of any more use to the Republicans this year if they too have worn out their welcome?

Where is Osama bin Laden anyway? Catching him will be the best Bush booster, but the timing must be just right: sometimes in late September, early October. Too soon, and the effect will wear off as it did with Saddam. After early November – who cares.

In the next election a lot will be said about the economy. When Clinton in 1991 beat Bush, the father, his mantra was: "It's the economy, stupid," even though this really was not the case, as the 1990's became the most prosperous ever. Now it's a different story. Here's why.

Economics against nature

The words 'Economics' and 'Ecology' almost sound alike, thanks to having the word 'Eco' in common, derived from the Greek 'oikos' which means 'house' or to be more exact, the 'human home,' our habitat. In 'Economics' the 'nomics' part also comes from the Greek 'nomos' which means 'law' or 'principle.' Thus 'economics' literally stands for: 'the law for the world we live in.' In 'ecology' the latter part has the Greek root of 'logos' which, so says my Greek dictionary – I had 5 years of Greek in my younger years – can be interpreted in about 60 different ways, of which the more common are 'book,' 'story' and

Politics, money, nature

'word.' So Ecology, if it lives up to its original setting, should tell us 'The habitat story.' Ecology is doing this, by and large.

Is economics? If this were the case economics should closely relate to nature, should look to the earth, the sky and the water, on which our lives depend for food, air and liquids with maximum concern and base human needs on how these fundamental elements can provide for us for ever and ever, without harming them.

However, in our times 'economics' has divorced itself from its linguistic moorings, limiting its scope to money and profit. Something is uneconomic when it fails to earn an adequate return in terms of money.

Its real goal is profit-making and our basis in the natural world is ignored. Economics deals exclusively with goods and services from the point of view of the market, where a willing buyer meets a willing seller. The buyer is nothing but bargain hunter, doesn't care where the goods come from or under what conditions they are produced.

The sole concern of the 'consumer' is to get the biggest bang for the buck. If a buyer refuses a real deal because she expects that the cheapness of the goods in question stems from exploitation or bad environmental practices she would be open to the criticism of behaving 'uneconomically' and sin against the religion of economics, where the Market is god.

Money more meaningful than harmony

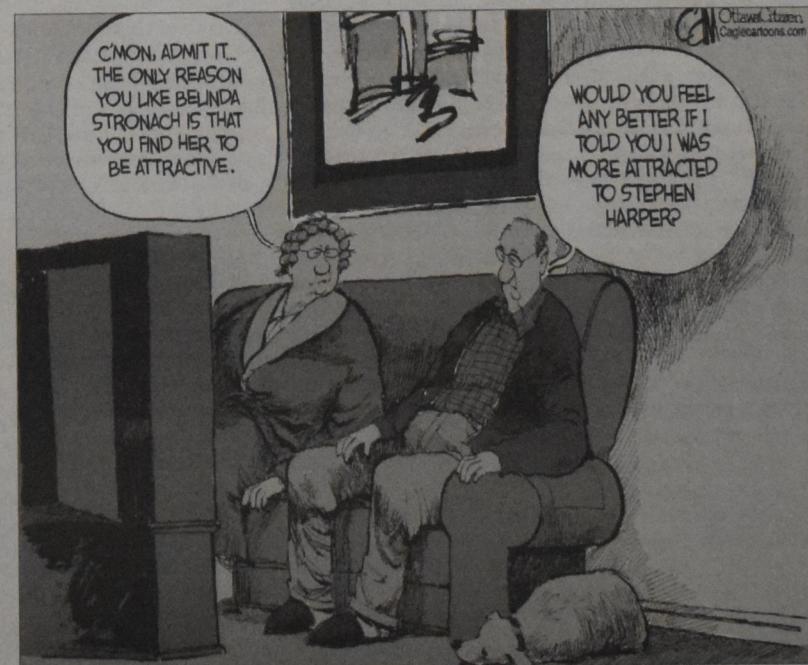
In our time this economic thinking has pervaded all of life. Even non-economic values like beauty, health or cleanliness can survive only if they prove to be 'economic.'

In this season of Lent a reference to the Bible is not out of place. Genesis 2 tells us that the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – "trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food." Note the order: for the Lord, the beauty aspect, the art form, the tree's shape and splendor come before its economic value, its fruit. In the next chapter, when humans are tested on their trust, the order is reversed. Suddenly (Genesis 3:6) its yield (the economics) is noted first, while its aesthetic aspect has become secondary.

Ever since, money has been the highest value of all. Not altogether without consequences. Take a report, entitled "An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and Its Implications for US National Security," commissioned by the Pentagon, the US military Head Office. This document warns that major European cities will be sunk beneath rising seas as Britain is plunged into a 'Siberian' climate by 2020, a mere 16 years from now. Nuclear conflict, mega-droughts, famine and widespread rioting will erupt across the world. Abrupt climate change could bring the planet to the edge of anarchy as countries develop nuclear threats to defend and secure dwindling food, water and energy supplies.

All this because we have rated economics more important than elegance, money more meaningful than harmony.

Maple syrup time again in Tweed. I tap about 5 trees, enough to provide us for a year.



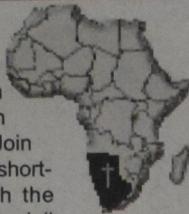
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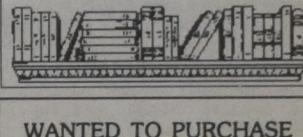


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For Rent	 Louise Bylsma on March 23, 2004, her 90th Birthday. And on April 14, 2004 Jack Bylsma his 92nd Birthday Also the Lord willing, they will celebrate their 69th Wedding Anniversary on May 29, 2004 The Lord has been good to them and to us to let us have them for so long. Their thankful children: Corrie Bergman (Jans t), Woodstock Tina Sientra (Henry t), Chatham Mike & Betty Bylsma, Woodstock Florence & Ben Olthoff, London 16 grandchildren, 28 great-grandchildren 3 great-great-grandchildren Address: 110 Beale St #202, Woodstock ON N4S 6X5	1954 With joy and thankfulness to the Lord we hope to celebrate with our Mom, Grandma, Great-granda & Great-great-grandma Louise Bylsma on March 23, 2004, her 90th Birthday. And on April 14, 2004 Jack Bylsma his 92nd Birthday Also the Lord willing, they will celebrate their 69th Wedding Anniversary on May 29, 2004 The Lord has been good to them and to us to let us have them for so long. Their thankful children: Corrie Bergman (Jans t), Woodstock Tina Sientra (Henry t), Chatham Mike & Betty Bylsma, Woodstock Florence & Ben Olthoff, London 16 grandchildren, 28 great-grandchildren 3 great-great-grandchildren Address: 110 Beale St #202, Woodstock ON N4S 6X5	March 26 2004 "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Matt. 6:33 With thanksgiving to God for his countless blessings, we are pleased to announce the 50th Wedding Anniversary of our parents and grandparents, LEN (Lammert) AND MARIA BOUWSEMA (nee Van Dijk) Congratulations Pa and Mom, Grandpa and Grandma! With love from your children and grandchildren: Betty Seton - Kelly Cor & Joanne Bouwsema - Jennifer, Stephanie, Melissa Peter & Lorraine Bouwsema - Eric & Becky, Brent, Kevin Arnold & Sharon Zwart - Stephen, Melinda, Nicole An Open House will be held Saturday, March 27 from 2-4 PM at their home: 36 Bowdale Crescent NW, Calgary Alberta T3B 1J4 lammertb@shaw.ca
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Met vriendelijke groeten Our apologies to the person that phoned and said he would send a fax. We did not receive it. Please contact us.	Dutch Community Easter Song Service on Easter Sunday, April 11th at 7:30 p.m. at the Emmanuel Reformed Church, 170 Clarke St. N. Woodstock , On Rev. Roeland Hartmans officiating Baby sitting is provided Refreshments will be served after the service.		

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Interested applicants may submit a resume by April 15 to the:

Worship Committee Attention: Ella Heslinga,
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TRENTON CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

invites applications from qualified teachers in our Junior and Intermediate grades, effective September 2004. Strength in Music or Phys. Ed., or French will be an asset. Applicants must be in full agreement with the TCS Constitution and commit to uphold and promote the same. Please send letter of application, resumes, etc. to:

340 Second Dug Hill Rd., RR #4, Trenton, K8V 5P7

Before April 8, 2004

London Parental Christian School

invites applications for a part time music position for the 2004-2005 school year

The music teacher will teach Grades 1 through 5 and carry out the Grades 6-8 Band program. This position could possibly be combined with a part time Grade 3 position.

Please send a statement of faith and a résumé to:

Mary Haven, Principal
London Parental Christian School
202 Clarke Road
London ON N5W 5E4

DURHAM CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL

invites applications for the following positions for the 2004/5 school year:

Full Time Position in:

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Please call, fax or email

Mr. Fred Spoelstra, Principal
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Mr. Dan Demeter, Principal
King's Christian School
350B 30th St. N.E. Salmon Arm, BC V1E 1J2
Ph: 250-804-0340 Fax: 250-804-0390
Email: info@



For issue dates, deadlines and advertising information, and job opportunity ads visit our website at: www.christiancourier.ca

Advertising

SCHOONOORD JUBILEE

Schoonoord viert in het jaar 2004 het 150 jarig bestaan. Dat gaat het hele dorp vieren van zaterdag 10 juli t.m. zaterdag 17 juli. Op donderdag 15 juli zal er een réunie plaatsvinden voor Schoonoorders en oud-Schoonoorders die ook in Canada of Amerika wonen.

Wat is er mooier om deze week naar Schoonoord te komen met vakantie en dan tevens de oude bekenden de hand te drukken, en het glas te heffen op ons mooi dorp.

Het programma is nog niet definitief maar een foto expositie mag natuurlijk niet ontbreken. Dus heeft U nog oude foto's zend die dan voorzien van naam en adres zodat ze weer bij de rechtmatige eigenaar terug bezorgd kunnen worden. Aansluitend is er een revue in de grote feesttent.

Aanmelden en foto opsturen kan naar en bij:

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March 27 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.

GUELPH, Evergreen Senior Centre

April 3 at 2 p.m.

JORDAN, Christian Heritage School

April 24 at 8 p.m.

For tickets to the above performances, please

send cheque and stamped self addressed envelope to: Adrian Rodenburg,

RR 4, Thamesford ON N0M 2M0

Tel: 519-283-6285 - or -

Jan Wubben ,

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Items appearing in this column are run free of charge if they advertise an admission-free event, if they accompany an ad for the same event, or at the discretion of CC. In case of free listing, space limitations apply. The charge otherwise is \$7.50 per line, or \$1.50 per 1/3 line, per insertion

Mar 26,27 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "De Avond van de zevende Juli" 2 pm & 8 pm at **Woodstock Market Centre Theatre**. Phone 519-283-6285 or 519-539-8940 for more info.

Apr 3 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "De Avond van de zevende Juli" 2 pm at **Evergreen Senior Centre, Guelph**. Phone 519-283-6285 or 519-539-8940 for more info.

Apr. 10 **Annual Festival of Praise** by the **Christian Male Chorus** Association of Southwestern Ontario. 7:30 p.m. Centennial Hall, 550 Wellington St. **London**. Five choirs with over 200 men participating. Tickets: \$13 (519)451-5484 or email: jettrick@sympatico.ca For information: (519)637-4357.

Apr. 11 **Dutch Community Easter Song Service** on Easter Sunday, at 7:30 p.m. At the Emmanuel Reformed Church 170 Clarke St. N. **Woodstock**, On Rev. Roeland Hartmans officiating

Apr.18, 24, 25 **Hebron CRC, Whitby**, Ontario, 50th anniversary celebrations. See ad next issue or phone 1-905-655-5020 or website www.hebroncrc.ca for more info

Apr 24 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "De Avond van de zevende Juli" 8 pm at the **Jordan**, Christian Heritage School. Phone 519-283-6285 or 519-539-8940 for more info.

Apr. 24 The **MEN OF PRAISE** (from Woodstock) in concert, at the Ebenezer CRC, **Jarvis** Ont., at 7:30 pm. Freewill offering.

Apr. 24 **Festival of Praise** Male Choirs from Brampton, Hamilton, York, Simcoe & St. Catharines. 7:30 pm. at Covenant CRC, 278 Parnell St. **St. Catharines**. For tickets (\$10) and info, call 905-934-1348. See next issue for more information.

Apr 30 The **First Royal Dutch Treat** will take place at the Liberty Grand, Exhibition Place in **Toronto**, Ontario. See this issue for more information or see www.royaldutchtreat.ca

Apr 30, May 2 John Calvin CRC, **Truro**, Nova Scotia 50th anniversary. Former Ministers, members and friends are invited to a celebration potluck dinner & program Friday and Sunday service. For more information call (902) 897-2083 or aalkema@ns.sympatico.ca

May 2 **Concert of Sacred Music** by **St. Thomas Cresendo Male Choir** 7:30 pm Knox Presbyterian Church 55 Hincks St. **St. Thomas**. Freewill offering for Canadian Bible Society. (519)637-4357

May 2 Guelph Spring Festival presents duo organists **Jan Overduin & Jonathan Oldengarm** in concert at 3:00 pm. A pre-concert chat will be held at 2:30 pm. Both events at St. George's Anglican Church, 99 Woolwich Street, **Guelph, ON**. For tickets and information, call the River Run Centre Box Office at 519-763-3000 or 1-877-520-2408, or visit www.guelphspringfestival.org

May 7 Calgary Society of Organists presents **Jonathan Oldengarm** in concert, 8:00 pm., at Grace Presbyterian Church, **Calgary, AB**. For information call 403-249-0764. Single tickets are \$15 and single student/senior tickets are \$10.

May 15,16 **Sarnia First Christian Reformed Church**, 70th Anniversary. Contact firstcrc@xcelco.on.ca for more information, or call 519-336-8808. See ad this issue.

May 18 National organ competition winner **Jonathan Oldengarm** plays monumental works of the French romantics on the great Casavant organ at St. Mary's Basilica, Spring Garden Road at Barrington Street, **Halifax, NS**. **8:00 pm**. For tickets and information, call the St. Cecilia Concert Series Box Office at 902-420-4085, or visit www.stcecilia.ca.

May 29 First Christian Reformed Church of **Montreal** will celebrate its **50th anniversary**. Ph: 1-514-684-4430 or E-mail: georgelucy@aei.ca See ad this issue

ROYAL DUTCH TREAT

On Friday, April 30th 2004 from 6:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. the First Royal Dutch Treat will take place at the Liberty Grand, Exhibition Place in Toronto, Ontario.

The Royal Dutch Treat with Consul General, Mr. Jan Hesseling as Patron, coincides with the traditional celebrations in Holland in honour of the Dutch Queen's birthday. The Dutch Treat Organization Inc. organizes the event, which is a not-for-profit networking organization. Its objectives are to enhance the awareness of the Dutch people in Canada through various events.

The event will showcase "what it means to be Dutch". The activities are various and many attendees will recognize the typical Dutch Flea market as well as the traditional foods such as herring and croquettes. There will also be live cabaret, a jazz club, a Dutch DJ, face painting and attendees can visit a "Lights on Holland" pavillion which showcases Holland in all its famous aspects such as Madurodam maquettes and a mini Keukenhof (flower display).

Major Dutch corporations doing business in Canada are sponsoring the event. Some of our sponsors are: Philips, Heineken, KLM, ABN AMRO and AKZO Nobel.

"Approximately one million people of Dutch descent are living in Canada and it is our goal to reach 2,000 attendees the first year with a target of 5000 in 2006 and for the other 4 Dutch Treat cities in Canada to pick up this event in the coming years", said Wilbert Witkamp, Chair, Royal Dutch Treat.

Tickets for the event are on sale only through the website www.royaldutchtreat.ca and the cost is \$35.00 per person, which includes a buffet dinner and all entertainment. All funds raised through the silent auction and raffle during the event will go to the Robert de Jager Foundation to purchase equipment and medical supplies for a hospital in Brazil.

For further information, please contact: Wilbert Witkamp, Chairman, Royal Dutch Treat at 905-633-8662 or wwitkamp@cogeco.ca

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50th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

Saturday April 24

Open House & Kids' Events 2-4 pm

Banquet – 5:30 pm

Music and Memories Evening 8 pm

April 18 & 25 10 am Celebration Services

Banquet tickets & information
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50TH ANNIVERSARY

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FIRST CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF MONTREAL

will celebrate its **50th anniversary**
D.V. May 29th, 2004

and cordially invites all former members and pastors.

Photo's & images of past and present would be appreciated.

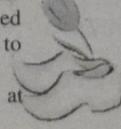
Phone **1-514-684-4430** [7-10 p.m. EST]

E-mail: georgelucy@aei.ca

70TH ANNIVERSARY SARNIA FIRST CRC

May 15 dinner at 5:30 p.m. (reservation needed)
7 p.m. program at Sarnia Christian School

May 16: Celebratory Anniversary Worship Service
Contact firstcrc@xcelco.on.ca or call **519-336-8808**



News

Mission offers tours to raise support for work among Namibia's Bushmen

South West Africa Ministry (SWAM) functions as a charitable Christian and Mission Support Ministry in the US and Canada. SWAM specializes in partnering interested individuals, organizations and congregations from the West with their church partner (the Dutch Reformed Church) in south western Africa region. This includes the countries of South Africa, Namibia and Botswana. Partnering could include ministry opportunities like short term missions, humanitarian aid and relief and development and many more.

The Dutch Reformed Church



(DRC) is the main confession among the Afrikaans speaking people of the SWAM region. It plays an active role in fighting socio-economic problems like poverty, unemployment, crime and combating HIV/Aids, etc. in the region. Abroad the DRC has full ties with the Christian Reformed Church of Northern America, the Christian Reformed Church in Australia and the Reformed Church in Japan.

The DRC of Southern Africa also belongs to the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. All along the DRC has been a missionary church, involved in extended missions all over Southern Africa. Sister churches were planted in Malawi (Church of Central Africa Presbyterian), Zimbabwe (Reformed Church in Zimbabwe and CCAP Harare Synod), Zambia (Reformed Church in Zambia), Botswana (Dutch Reformed Church in Botswana), Mozambique (Igreja Reformada em Mozambique), Kenya (Reformed Church in East Africa), Nigeria, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia, etc.

A valuable part SWAM's focus is on the Northern region of Namibia. Although Namibia is an independent country, the DRC Synod of Namibia forms part of the General Synod of the DRC in

Southern Africa with several congregations in the region.

Ministry among the Bushmen of Namibia

Most people remember the movie, *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, featuring the Bushmen of Namibia, in Africa. During the 1960's the Dutch Reformed Church started missionary work amongst the Bushmen in the North Eastern part of Namibia. Today there are four traditional Bushman congregations; every one of them serves an average of 2000 Bushmen in these remote areas of Northeast Namibia. The Bushmen are small people with distinctive tufted hair and fine features, and a penchant for telling and acting out hilarious stories.

Their language is full of clicks, denoted by exclamation marks; when written, it's almost impossible to learn — but wonderful to listen to. The Bushmen are kind and non-aggressive by nature, and smile easily. They make curios and trade them for food.

Due to improved communication and transport services the Bushmen are increasingly exposed to Western culture and ways of living. The flocking in of other ethnic groups to traditional Bushman lands, as well as continuing droughts make it impossible for the Bushmen to live from the veld as



they used to. The food in the veld and game have become scarce. They even find it difficult to make traditional clothes because the hides of game are no longer readily available. Work is scarce; since most of them live in the veld, only a few of the Bushmen have a permanent job or income. Poverty and famine are constant problems, which are only addressed by government in a very limited way.

Together with The Dutch Reformed Church in Namibia and South Africa, SWAM is involved in the uplifting of the Bushman community in several ways: maintaining the cultural heritage of the Bushmen, providing for social needs, acquiring life skills and agricultural skills, and ministering to

their spiritual and emotional care.

Jaco Jacobs, executive director of SWAM recently delivered 90,000 meals of dehydrated food to this impoverished people. Several other projects are ongoing in the region. Jacobs, a White Rock, BC resident of Afrikaans descent, who was himself born in Namibia, visits his homeland regularly, both for missions work and also to lead Short Term Mission Trips.

Short Term Mission Trips

These trips focus on the mission congregations of the Dutch Reformed Church and are open to any member of the general public who has an interest in seeing and experiencing SWAM's work in the field. The teams focus on a variety of activities including but not limited to feeding projects, preschool children, building and church support as well as health care — all combined with a wonderful time and a focus on Christian and missions history of the region. Besides normal missions activities, those joining the trips will also find it very informative, educational and inspirational. This summer two 14-day trips have been scheduled for, leaving July 9 and August 6, 2004.

Anyone interested in joining one of our groups to explore the mission congregations in this remote but beautiful part of the world could contact Jaco for more information.


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See mission opportunity ad on page 19.